L. C.

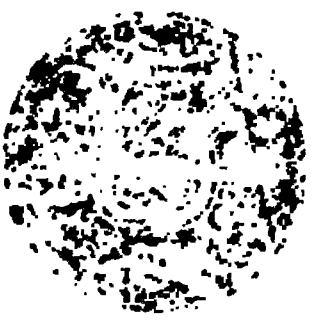
"YOU DISPARAGE IT BECAUSE YOU ARE JEALOUS OF HIM."

*Frontispiece p. 211*

# THE VOICE OF THE HEART

*A Romance*

MARGARET BLAKE



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# THE VOICE OF THE HEART

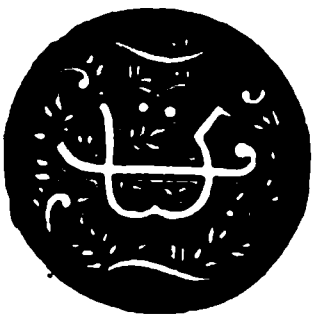
*A Romance*

BY

MARGARET BLAKE

AUTHOR OF

"THE GREATER JOY"



ILLUSTRATIONS BY

E. A. FURMAN

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PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

*The Voice of the Heart*

# ILLUSTRATIONS

# THE VOICE OF THE HEART

## CHAPTER I

There was to be a wedding at Penascapet Mountain House that year, and the entire house rejoiced at an affair which brought so much pleasurable excitement with it. The Reynolds, a family of five, had occupied the right wing of the Penascapet Mountain House every summer for the past twenty-five years. Emma Reynolds, the eldest daughter, had been born there, and she was determined to celebrate her nuptials in a good-sized summer house erected on the floor of an old barn, which overlooked a small pond plentifully supplied with water-lilies in summer, and which, in winter, grew so many successive crops of ice on its miniature area that there was enough frozen water to preserve the provisions and supply the icewater pitchers of the seventy odd guests of the Penascapet House through the ensuing summers.

Day after day the younger element repaired to the summer house to settle the weighty problem of decoration, for Emma Reynolds wanted no florist's flowers.

"Daisies and water-lilies and devil's paint-brushes," suggested Louise Reynolds, who was her sister's junior by two years. She was a dainty blonde, with eyes of sky-blue.

"Devil's paint-brushes! Horrors!" Emma looked her scorn. "Devil's paint-brushes, indeed! I want white flowers only."

"White flowers only," giggled Louise. "Betty Garside, did you hear that?"

The girl addressed as Betty Garside raised her brows without lifting her eyes. They were beautifully penciled black brows, and stood out with startling vividness from the white face. Betty Garside was barely eighteen. There was about her a fragrance and a dewiness which made her conspicuous, even among the group of attractive girls with whom she was sitting. Her eyes were black; her blue-black hair lay back from the temples in glossy waves; to-day, because the sultry August morning had given her a slight headache, she wore the shower of black curls schoolgirl fashion down her back, securing the heavy cluster of hair with a big white bow in the nape of the neck. Her complexion, instead of being the usual dusky complexion of the brunette, was dazzlingly, snowily white. A faint sea-shell pink invaded the cheeks in trailing ridges, on much the same plan as the petal of a white peony is veined with pink.

"Well," said Betty, "and why shouldn't she have white flowers? If I were to be married, I wouldn't want any color but white."

"Oh, well—for *you* white would be appropriate," said one of the girls, and Louise added:

"Because you are so painfully good, Betty."

"I'm not painfully good, at all!" Betty repudiated the arraignment of being good as indignantly as any normal girl of her age would have done. "I hate goody-goodies."

"But, really, Betty," Louise mocked, "you are painfully, distressingly good."

"I would like to know in what way?"

"Help me think of an answer, girls," entreated Louise.

"We're not running a public thinkery, thank you," someone said.

Another girl remarked, apparently without relevance:

"If Emma were being married down Louisiana way, in the old days, she wouldn't be able to move out of the house or see a soul except Mrs. Reynolds and Louise for the last three days before the wedding. Barbarous custom, wasn't it? They did that to mother. How she ever survived it, I'm sure I don't know."

"I think that a sweet custom," Betty said defensively. "If I were about to be married, I would shut out the world for the last three days that I might think only of my intended and our joint future."

"Oh, slush!" said Louise; "slush, mush, and punk. Who's the sentimental goody-goody now?"

But the girl who had told about the old custom continued:

"That wasn't the reason they kept the bride-to-be indoors for three days. It was considered immodest, you know, for her to show herself in public."

"Immodest?" Betty asked innocently.

"Immodest. Goodness, don't you understand?" the girl asked, a little impatiently, and the irrepressible Louise added:

"Get an axe, someone. First aid to the slow-witted. Oh, Betty! How *stoopid* you are in some things. You don't seriously suppose, do you, Betty Garside, that a man marries a girl just to decorate his breakfast-table, and for the fun of paying her dressmakers' bills? You don't believe that, do you, now?"

"Well," said Betty, her chin high in the air, "I do think that, if he is a nice-minded man, he thinks just of the affection he feels for his betrothed, and of the companionship, and of the feeling that she and he are everything in the wide world to each other."

The girls laughed, all but Emma Reynolds, who said very seriously:

"Betty is right." Then, with a sweet, protective ges-

ture, she threw her arm about the shoulders of the younger girl, and, drawing Betty toward herself, kissed her. "Marriage must be based on true affection, companionship, respect," she said gravely, addressing herself to Betty only, "if it is to be a real marriage. The other feeling, dearie, as you will realize some day, must be there, too. But it's subordinate to the others."

"I wouldn't marry any man in whom the other feeling existed," Betty said agitatedly.

"I hope you won't marry any man in whom it does not exist," Emma responded, now vastly amused by Betty's stubbornness.

"Well, at any rate, feelings or no feelings," Louise sang out, "Betty is going to be the next bride. Did you know it, girls?" Louise adored Betty, thought her quite perfect, but she was never content to be near Betty without harassing her with her teasing.

"How can you make such a statement, Louise?" Betty demanded indignantly. "Why, I'm not even in love."

"But someone is in love with you—Mr. Pidgin."

Betty tossed her black curls angrily. Usually she parried allusions to the gentleman Louise had named with good-natured contempt, but to-day, because Louise's allusions followed suggestive remarks, she became blindly angry.

"There's Mr. Pidgin now, Betty," Louise continued her tormenting. "He's coming up the hill. Coming here to look for you."

Betty sprang up excitedly.

"I'm going," she cried. "I leave Mr. Pidgin to you and your edifying conversation." The girls, amazed, and a little frightened at gentle Betty's unwonted fury, stopped laughing, and tried to remonstrate with her, but Betty, gathering up several books, ran from the pavilion,

and sped agilely along the road in a direction opposite to the one in which Mr. Pidgin was ambling along.

Betty did not return to the hotel immediately. The impure thoughts which some of the girls had voiced troubled her strangely. She could not comprehend how girls, nice girls, girls brought up like herself, could jest and speak openly upon subjects of sex. The entire subject of sex revolted Betty unspeakably. For a long time she had imagined that it would be sweet to be in love; her imagination had bodied forth in vain attempts to evoke a vision of the sort of man she would love; she had no predilection, no prejudice for or against men fair or dark, men gaunt or plump; one prejudice only she possessed, and that was strong as the Rock of Gibraltar. The man she loved must differ in one particular from the average man as she reluctantly realized the average man to be. The man she loved must know no yearnings of sex. He must love her as she loved him—purely, truly, romantically. The voice of the heart must speak in him as in her, and must bind one to the other. She refused to admit the validity of the call of the flesh.

To banish the disagreeable thoughts which the foolish remarks of the girls had induced in her, she went for a long walk down a footpath that ended in an old Indian trail running along the mossy bank of an extinct river, where ferns and bracken, arbutus plants, and wintergreen berries grew in sweet confusion. When, two hours later, she emerged from the woods, homeward bound, she had left behind her all disagreeable thoughts, and all the resentment she had felt against Louise earlier in the day. Instead, she was filled with a strange, subdued glow of happiness.

She went to her room and dressed for supper. Immediately after supper Louise and the other girls, instead of waiting for Betty to join them, miraculously disap-

peared. Betty, to spoil their attempt to discipline her for her desertion in the afternoon, wandered into the tiny room set apart as a reading-room, and began examining the books stacked on the old-fashioned swing shelf. The name of Swinburne caught her eye. She remembered that at school Swinburne was one of the poets from whom no excerpts had been offered to stimulate their youthful palates for the classics—a circumstance which had interested her, even then. She had always meant, in a vague way, to explore Swinburne at some time for this reason, but the curiosity aroused in her had never been sufficiently great to overcome the inertia of Betty's lymphatic temperament. And Swinburne had not been explored.

She took down the volume from the shelf, and opened it at haphazard. The first sentence she read had the blinding effect of a spray of cold water. The next moment liquid fire surged through Betty's brain. This was literature, indeed!

She had chanced upon "The Garden of Proserpine":

> From too much joy of living,
> From hope and fear made free
> We thank, with brief thanksgiving,
> Whatever gods may be,
> That no man lives forever,
> That dead men rise up never,
> That e'en the weariest river,
> Flows somewhere safe to sea.

Breathlessly, oblivious of time, she read on and on. A step came down the corridor. It was her mother.

"What are you doing here, Betty?"

Betty started.

"I came up for a handkerchief and happened to stop here for a moment," she answered glibly. It was the first deliberate untruth she had ever told her mother, and

she could not have told why she told it. Her mother would not have objected to her reading Swinburne, for her mother was continually urging her to overcome her innate laziness and read "good literature". Probably her mother would have been delighted to hear that Betty was taking a step in the right direction. But Betty, unaccountably, meant to hoard to herself the sweet honey she had discovered by herself.

"I am tired," said Betty's mother. "I am going to bed. Are you coming?"

"Yes, Mother."

But, on the way to her room, Betty encountered Louise.

"Oh, Betty," exclaimed Louise, "what do you think? Emma is still on the back porch with Herman."

The responsive smile, which Louise expected, was not forthcoming. Betty's brain was on fire from her hour's reading, and she was in sympathy with the lovers. They had sat on the back porch as the sun went down, filling in the colossal spaces between the mountains and tree-trunks and the tiny spaces between the leaves and ripening fruit of the orchard with amber, burnt orange, and gold. The back porch was innocent of a lantern, and Betty pictured the lovers sitting in the gathering darkness, in their nostrils the sweet scent of mellowing sickle pears, ripening plums, and fallen and bruised apples, rendered oblivious, because of the magic of clasped hands and soft pressure of lips, to fluttering moths, wheeling millers, and flapping bats. It was a sensation that was new to Betty—this feeling of sympathy for lovers. In it there was something vaguely resembling envy. Yet why should she feel envy? Certainly Herman, a commonplace youth, with a gawky walk, dull face, and awkward manners, would have added no enchantment to the night for her. She would have hated the love-touch of his red, clammy hands. She hated to shake hands with him even.

"And, what do you think, Betty?" Louise inquired, with the inevitable giggle, "*what* do you think? Mr. Pidgin asked for you three times this afternoon and four times this evening. Oh, Betty!" Giggling with Louise was not so much an action as a condition, and she was in the throes now.

"Did he?" queried Betty, with fine scorn. "Mr. Pidgin is a creature of habit. Because he sits at the same table with mother and myself, he feels a sort of proprietary interest in us."

"Does he, though?" asked Louise. "He sat at the same table with us all last year, but he never asked for me when I left the piazza. Believe me."

"Perhaps you never left it when he was around. Perhaps his presence anchored you to the spot."

"Oh, *Betty!* Oh, Betty!" remonstrated Louise.

Mr. Pidgin was the staple of conversation at Penascapet Mountain House. Without Mr. Pidgin conversation would have degenerated into chatter upon subjects of perennial interest, such as the servant-girl question, and the cost of living, and the corruption of the United States senate. But Mr. Pidgin furnished a timely interest and promoted conversation—Mr. Pidgin, whose name was a cruel misnomer, because he tipped the scales at two hundred and fifty, and had a complexion as florid as a newborn infant's. Mr. Pidgin's masculinity was the only trait that had thrust him upon this pinnacle of surpassing interest, because, for six days out of seven, barring the gardener, the stableman, the host, and the bellboy, Mr. Pidgin was the only man at Penascapet House. The rest of the men, Herman included, came on for the week-end every Saturday, which, in that unsophisticated community, was termed "coming up over Sunday".

On Monday morning, long before the fair sex had *rallied from* the phlegmatic delights of slumber, there

was a general exodus of the stronger sex. Mr. Pidgin alone remained, although he was continually proclaiming his intention "to go down to the city next week" to look after some business interests. He had proclaimed this so often that Mr. Pidgin's business interests, like Mr. Pidgin himself, had become one of the standing jokes at Penascapet.

Certainly Mr. Pidgin looked as if he had not a care in the world, and it was rumored that he had an income of over twenty-five thousand a year. Why a man with twenty-five thousand a year should elect to come year after year to so slow a place as Penascapet, where there was nothing to do but to walk and to eat and to talk, was a mystery to the younger guests, who would have preferred the seashore for their summer's holiday, and who one and all endured Penascapet only because their parents brought them there willy-nilly. For dearth of more interesting subject matter the girls fell to accusing each other of being the magnet that attracted Mr. Pidgin to the Penascapet oasis year after year. Betty, of late, had become the storm center of these fusillades of wit. There was, indeed, as Betty's mother saw with secret joy, ample grounds for this teasing.

"And is Mr. Pidgin going to New York to-morrow?" Betty asked, sitting down on the stairs, with the volume of Swinburne between her and the carpet, making a highly uncomfortable seat. She would have died rather than let Louise see that treasured tome. The entire house would be apprised before breakfast the next morning that Betty Garside had taken to reading poetry, and they would have drawn, heaven only knows what inferences, quite possibly the preposterous one that she was in love with Mr. Pidgin.

The thought that Mr. Pidgin could induce in anyone "too great a joy of living" tickled Betty's sense of humor.

She grinned, Cheshire-cat fashion. At that moment Mr. Pidgin, puffing like an asthmatic steam-engine, hove in sight from below. When his head was on a level with the banisters of the first landing, Louise called out:

"Miss Garside wants to know whether you are going to the city to-morrow, Mr. Pidgin."

"In this heat? Indeed not," puffed Mr. Pidgin. "I am going to ask every young lady under twenty to go on a straw-ride to-morrow."

"How lovely," Betty said ironically.

"There'll be at least sixteen of us," giggled Louise. "You'll have your hands full, Mr. Pidgin."

"To have my hands full of such charming buds as are assembled at Penascapet is something to be envied for," rejoined Mr. Pidgin. He addressed Louise, but looked at Betty, as Betty, who sat with downcast eyes, knew perfectly well.

"A straw-ride will be awfully comfortable for you, Mr. Pidgin." This from Louise.

Betty thought: "Heavens, how inane it all is." She was burning to get to her room with her newly discovered Swinburne, and, besides, the book upon which she was still sitting was beginning to give her a cramp.

"I shall sit next to the driver," said Mr. Pidgin. "I will be quite comfortable there."

"There are two seats next to the driver," commented Louise.

"Then, if you are a good little girl, I will let you sit next to me."

Betty rose abruptly. As a rule these inanities of conversation mildly amused her because of their very inanity. To-day they were insufferable. She wanted to shout out aloud that it was waste of time to indulge in such verbal froth when golden treasures of thought, couched in the silver and amethyst of matchless language, were to be found in the very house.

Towering above the pudgy Mr. Pidgin and the silly Louise, her pale young splendor, with its dark halo of hair detaching itself from its surroundings, was like a pillar of sculptured alabaster, which, by some untowardness of fate, has been condemned to a place in a vegetable garden.

"Good-night," she exclaimed. "Mother is waiting for me."

Betty smuggled the volume of poetry into her room unperceived by anyone. Usually she undressed in the dark, with only the light shining through the transom above the door to guide her, but to-day she groped for the matches and struck a light. Scarcely half an inch of candle remained in the candlestick, for at Penascapet candles were the only mode of illumination employed in the bedrooms.

Betty hailed a maid who was passing the door.

"Maggie," Betty cried, "can you get me a candle? Two candles?"

"Two, Miss?" inquired the girl. She emphasized the word unconsciously. "What may you be wantin' with two candles, Miss?"

"I may want to sit up until after midnight."

"Fancy staying up that late," said Maggie. She opened the door to an unused room. It cracked on its hinges, and Betty wondered what law of physics caused things which were noiseless in broad daylight to creak and squeak in the dark. Maggie came forth with three candles in her hand, and Betty thanked her volubly.

Betty's mother came into her room and kissed her good-night. Mother and daughter occupied adjoining rooms, and, finally, Betty was alone.

She undressed quickly, took her cold sponge bath, and hurried into her night-dress. Then she took up the volume of Swinburne and turned it lovingly in her hands. She thought of lying down in bed and reading, with a

candle beside her on a chair, but ultimately she shuddered away from the soft, warm embrace of pillows and bedding, and sat down at the open window, the candle on the window ledge.

The night was distressingly sultry. Even the tiny flame of the candle seemed to give out quantities of heat. Millers, with wiry wings, and white moths, with wings like swansdown, fluttered about, attracted by the flame of the candle. With the protecting wire screen between herself and these denizens of the air, of which Betty had all the average young girl's horror, she felt no alarm. A little gray moth had entered the room through some crack, and blindly made again and again for the light. Betty shooed it away.

"Foolish little thing," she said, "go away, go home; someone is waiting for you." She had often lured one of the flimsy things away from destruction with the same words, varying them sometimes, according to the size of the moth, with, "Go home, your mother is waiting for you," or "Go home, your babies are waiting for you." But to-night Betty added, as further admonishment to the uncomprehending moth, "Go home, little lady, your husband is waiting in your little cool nest in a tree-twig."

Having prevented disaster, Betty opened the precious volume at last and read. She read through the entire length of three candles. She read all of Atalanta in Calydon, and the chorus and semi-chorus she went over three or four times, until she had them by heart, for Betty had an extraordinary memory. She was intoxicated, ravished by the profusion of metaphors, the wealth of language, the almost Oriental display of diction. The rhythm, sophisticated and premeditated, communicated a rhythm to her pulses. She was in the *seventh* heaven of delight.

Again and again she closed the volume with the intention of crawling to bed. Again and again she opened it haphazard at some page, only to stumble upon some new beguilement, some new allure. The last poem she read was Rococo, and then she tumbled into bed.

Betty did not understand the hidden allusions, the carefully distilled poison, the pulsing, maddening passion of the poetry she had read. The royal garments in which the thoughts were clothed fascinated and mystified her, and as she fell asleep isolated lines of fragile beauty kept darting through her mind:

"Take hands and part with laughter,
Touch lips and part with tears,

Till rose leaves of December
The frosts of June shall fret."

The simple truth of the matter is that Betty was in love. When that term is employed, it is usual to assume that there is some person who inspires the affections which are at play. Not so. All young girls are in love in the abstract before some concrete image of a man crystallizes their affections and absorbs them. No one had as yet focussed Betty's love. It was still a half-wild, half-tame thing, more eager to be caught than to escape.

Betty had reached and passed the psychological moment that night. It would need the juice of no magic herb, dropped upon eye-lids, to imperil her freedom of fancy. Nature, her dormant woman's soul, her latent woman's need, a romantic imagination were the magic which would compass the transformation for which Oberon required the juice of the mystic herb.

"The next thing that she waking looks upon,
Be it on lion, bear or wolf, or bull,
On meddling monkey, or on busy ape,
She shall pursue it with the soul of love."

Betty slept at last, and dreamed of phantom kisses, intangible hand clasps and a ghostly face indistinguishable from the mists in which it was swathed.

## CHAPTER II

Betty's window faced the East, and at half past four in the morning her little room was filled brimful with light. Her mother gently pushed open the door, noiselessly crossed the room and as noiselessly closed the outer shutters, adjusting them so that they admitted the air but screened away the light.

Mrs. Garside was a tall, dark woman of forty. People said of her, "What a handsome woman she must have been once." But, as a matter of fact, the ruin was far more beautiful than the edifice had been in its palmy days. She had married a man far handsomer than herself, a step always more or less dangerous for any woman to take, and she had eaten her heart out ever since. Betty's father had been a gambler, a card-cheat, a professional poker player. His offenses had not ended there. When Betty was a year old he helped himself to the till of the firm that employed him as Cashier and disappeared.

The world commiserated the deserted wife, but Mrs. Garside, whatever regrets decency bade her express, was clandestinely jubilant to be rid of her husband. Those offenses of his of which the world had cognizance were mere bagatelles compared to the crowning misery he had inflicted on his wife. He was a libertine of the most unbridled and perverted tastes, and the young couple had not lived together a month before the young wife was utterly disillusioned as to the character of the man she had married.

Mrs. Garside had married her husband in opposition

to the wishes of her friends and family. She had broken with them because of her marriage. On realizing that they had been right and she wrong in the estimate formed of him, pride had kept her from appealing to them for advice and assistance. She refused to live with her husband. She hated him bitterly after the few short weeks she had lived with him. When finally he absconded her pride had become so threadbare and shabby from constant abrasion that it tore into a thousand flimsy ribbons.

All she had to rely upon for maintenance of herself and her child was an income of four hundred dollars in bonds which she had inherited from her father. But four hundred dollars is not sufficient to decently support two persons, no matter how humble and frugal their mode of living, and Mrs. Garside turned a naturally versatile genius to many odd shifts in the business of making a living. She gave piano lessons, she sewed dresses, she embroidered for department stores, she wrote paragraphs for the Sunday papers. In her leisure moments she attended to her housekeeping and her little daughter's clothes. Her energy was unremitting. Some years she scraped along for months at a time on barely nothing, but she did not touch her capital. To eat into her small capital would have seemed to this extraordinary woman not merely the height of imprudence but an act of treachery toward her child. What had most impressed her about the absconding of her husband was not the man's baseness so much as her own stupidity in having trusted a man of such calibre. She nourished a very robust self contempt for her powers of observation in the past, and having made the pivotal mistake in her woman's career, she meant to redeem herself in her own eyes by redoubled prudence in the future.

The injury she had sustained, as she blamed her own

lack of insight for it primarily, neither soured nor embittered her. It made her shrewd. From a sentimental, romantic, emotional girl she transformed herself in the year following her marriage into cold, calculating, dispassionate woman. When Betty was four years old her mother flattered herself that there was not a grain of sentiment left in her, except her mother love. Yet, in her new outlook upon life, maternity did not assume its usual aspect with her. No coddling, crooning, petting of her baby, no straining to her heart of the adorable youngster. Sentiment, running wild, had wrecked her life. She meant to bring up her child in ignorance of the softer emotions. She meant to harden her child spiritually by apparent diffidence and lack of endearments, as physicians harden a weak throat by exposing it to the chill blasts of winter. It never occurred to Mrs. Garside that by starving her child's emotional nature, she might be sowing the seeds of a catastrophe far exceeding her own shipwreck.

The distorted lenses through which she now viewed life seemed to her a corrective of her former vision, and made her ruthlessly pluck up the charming flowers of romance that grow along the path of the humblest. She meant to play destiny to Betty, with mathematical precision. She hardly ever kissed the child, lest she awaken Betty's emotional nature. When she kissed her child's rose petal lips, it seemed to her that she was pilfering sweets and succumbing to temptation. At night she sometimes sat beside the sleeping child, kissing the black curls, the dimpled, chubby hands, and the snowy brow. One night Betty had been awakened by these secret ministrations, and half asleep, wound her arms about her mother's neck.

"Why don't you kiss me oftener, Mother?" she asked, and was off again for the Land of Nod.

Mrs. Garside's object, of course, in eliminating from Betty's life the emotional side of life, was to prepare her, to win her into acquiescence in advance, for a match which Mrs. Garside would arrange for her in due time. No princess of the blood was more carefully chaperoned and taught, or more carefully groomed and manicured than Betty. She had a talent for music, and Mrs. Garside was determined that Betty should make the most of this natural gift, which, she argued, would add to her attractiveness. Nothing was omitted from the curriculum that might add to Betty's market value. More money was needed, after Betty was sixteen, and Mrs. Garside converted her bonds into copper mine stocks, paying a higher interest. But even with this increment, the income was inadequate, and it became necessary to touch the capital. Mrs. Garside spent nights in figuring out her campaign. There was enough money to last them until Betty would be twenty-two years old, and the mother calculated that there was no doubt that a husband would be found before then for a girl as exquisite as Betty.

Of Betty's exquisiteness there could be no doubt, Mrs. Garside reflected, as she sat at her daughter's bedside that sultry August morning. Betty's charm was not the charm of the wild flower, of which so much has been said and written. Hers was the charm of the highly cultivated white rose, and it was her exquisiteness, her preciousness, even more than her beauty which startled every chance acquaintance into looking at her a second, or even a third time.

Mrs. Garside's campaign had not miscarried. She had not aimed too high, being a shrewd woman, and she felt more contentment than she had felt in years as she sat looking at the sleeping girl. Betty's future was secure, unless Betty proved recalcitrant, and why should Betty

not be amenable, Betty, who knew nothing of love and sentiment and demonstrativeness? Of the delectable antidote to the maternal system which Betty had imbibed the night before, Mrs. Garside knew nothing, for the volume lay hidden from sight under Betty's pillow. She sat beside sleeping Betty for two hours, and for each moment of those two hours the woman thrilled and glowed with the maternal fires within her, unquenched and unextinguished by puerile fondling of her offspring.

Betty awoke at seven, a half hour before the rising bell; awoke without seeing her mother from whom she had turned in her sleep, awoke to the delicious languor of stretching and purring in bed, like a kitten, to shake the leaden mantle of sleep from her limbs.

"Betty," said Mrs. Garside.

"Mother, what are you doing here?"

"I want you to dress as quickly as possible, Betty. I have something to say to you before breakfast."

"What's happened, Mother?"

"Something of prime importance."

"Oh, Mother, tell me what. It isn't the copper mine, is it? Stocks haven't jumped to par, have they?"

"No, but my Betty has jumped to par."

"Now, what *can* you mean?"

"Last night, Mr. Pidgin asked me for an interview at twelve to-day. That means that he is going to offer himself."

"What have I got to do with that? Oh, a stepfather, and Fatty Pidgin! Oh, Mother, how can you?"

"Not a stepfather, but a husband for you, Betty."

Betty stared hard.

"Has he got a son?" she asked.

"Don't pretend to misunderstand me, Betty."

"You cannot mean——"

"Precisely."

"Never."

"You must."

"I won't."

"Betty!"

"Mother!"

Mrs. Garside looked at her daughter in perplexity. She felt a sudden faintness overwhelm her.

"Are you in love with anyone?" she demanded.

"Goodness gracious, of course not. How very funny. But I cannot marry Fatty Pidgin, Mother. Why, it's a joke. The girls would all laugh at me."

"Laughter is frequently a mask to hide envy."

But, no matter how neatly turned and how appropriate, no epigram had power to move Betty from her decision. Driven hard, making no headway against the child's sudden waywardness, Mrs. Garside had horrid visions of the carefully planned golden circle of Betty's life being distorted into an impossible éllipse.

"Mr. Pidgin is a wealthy man. He has twenty-five thousand a year."

"What has that got to do with it?"

"Everything, you are a poor girl."

"Well, if you wish me to marry money, there are other rich men, nearer my own age. I won't, positively, I won't marry Mr. Pidgin."

Betty looked unutterably disgusted. Louise's remark flashed back to her, "You don't suppose a man marries a girl just to decorate his breakfast table?" Her disgust changed to open revolt. Her mother, determined to quell her daughter's rebelliousness, threw caution to the winds. It had been part of the system to chaperone Betty so closely that she could afford to dispense with a good deal of miscellaneous knowledge with which some latter-day parents think it desirable to acquaint their daughters. She had feared, by making Betty self-con-

scious or shrewd, to rob her of some of the virginal charm which is one of the chief enhancements of youthful attractiveness. Now, in one gusty interview, she would have to rob Betty of many, perhaps of all illusions.

"Listen to me, Betty. Mr. Pidgin has very much more to offer you than I had dared hope for. He is a very desirable *parti.*"

Betty vaulted from the bed, and began unplaiting her hair.

"Mr. Pidgin is forty, if he is a day," she commented.

"If he were younger, with his income, he would be enjoying himself at some fashionable place, and he would never have seen you."

"Mother, you speak of me as if I were a commodity."

"That is precisely what you are."

Betty flushed furiously. Her dark eyes sparkled, she shook her head indignantly. The black curls fell into more graceful lines about the wonderfully well-bred, aristocratic face.

"It's unthinkable, Mother. I can't."

Betty did not raise her voice. Her aristocratic manner was never more apparent than when she was angry. And she was now more angry than she had ever been in all her life.

"It is not unthinkable."

"I do not love him."

"The statement is quite unnecessary, my child. I credit you with far too much taste and good sense to imagine that you do."

"You do not wish me to marry a man I hate?"

"It does not follow that you hate Mr. Pidgin because you do not happen to love him."

"If I marry him, I shall hate him."

"Betty, my dear, only the very rich and the very poor woman can afford to indulge her own taste in marrying.

I must speak frankly, Betty, and my frankness will seem brutal to you. You may rave and rant as much as you like. I brought you up to be married to the first eligible man who wanted you, and marry him you will and shall."

There was an ominous pause. Betty furiously brushed and combed her hair, which, tightly curled from its recent proximity to the warmth of Betty's head, snarled about her fingers in serpentine twists. Suddenly she threw the brush upon the bed, and demanded indignantly:

"You brought me up for that? You brought me up for the purpose of marrying me off? Why, it's legitimized prostitution."

Whence had this wisdom come so suddenly? Her mother questioned Betty with her eyes, and Betty questioned her mother in return in the same mute way. Some chance-spoken phrase by a chance acquaintance, overheard heaven-knows-where, had leapt into her brain and exploded the cauldron of her anger.

"Legitimized prostitution," she repeated, with a little gasp to cover her confusion and show that she was not ashamed of having spoken the words. "I refuse to marry him."

"I am glad that your knowledge of certain phases of life enables me to speak with absolute candor," said Mrs. Garside, icily. "Some imbecile invented the phrase which you have just used. The phrase negatives itself. It contradicts itself. The word 'prostitute' implies that woman has given some man a husband's privileges without being his wife in return for money. A woman who does that is a fool, because there is no woman alive who, if she plays her cards properly, cannot obtain both the status of a wife and the money which a wife receives in return for said privileges. Do you follow me?"

"Yes," said Betty thickly. She hid her blushes behind the screen of hair that was falling about her face like a mantle.

"That is why a prostitute is scorned so much more by women than by men. It is commonly said that men are kinder-hearted, because a man more easily than a woman will forgive a woman who has gone wrong. That is not true. They condone the fault more readily, because as a class, they are not injured by a fallen woman.

"Marriage is the one, unfailing profession for a woman. It is the one profession in which woman, self-evidently, need not fear the rivalry of man. But all virtuous women, married or unmarried, fear the rivalry of the prostitute, because the prostitute sells for a very trifling return an asset which history, custom, religion, civic spirit and man's chivalry have constituted, in the hands of a clever woman, an incomparable and invaluable asset. It is not the offense against morality so much as the offense against the class interest of woman as woman, that so enfuriates the average respectable woman when she sees a fallen sister. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Betty. She had finished combing her hair, and was piling it up in rippling tiers. This commercial aspect of marriage made the burning words which she had read the night before seem incredibly remote. She had always known that her mother was a competent woman,—but she had never suspected her of being a clever one, and her mother's sudden conversational prowess amazed and impressed her exceedingly.

"Every woman sells herself as dearly as possible," her mother continued, "for marriage is always a purchase. Some women sell themselves for love, some for money, some for position, some for power."

"I do not see how you can call a love marriage a sale,"

said Betty. "Love for love, that is fair and square and honest."

"Is it? It means that the woman gets what she most desires in return for herself. If she desires love more than anything else, she sells herself for love,—a most perishable return for a perishable asset."

"It is awful to hear you talking of love like that," said Betty sombrely. Her voice was almost a whisper.

"I married for love, Betty."

"Not all love marriages turn out as unfortunately as yours, Mother."

Mrs. Garside winced.

"Not all, but a good many do. Betty, I have known many married women in the course of my life. I am not exaggerating when I say that out of every ten married women nine would embrace freedom with prayers of gratitude providing they could retain their children, the status of a married woman and their share of the income which their husbands hand over to them on Saturday night."

"I don't believe it."

"You will, when you are a little older. At your age, my child, we think that a smiling face hides a smiling heart. But women smile for many reasons. They smile because pride bids them hide their disappointment, or from an unselfish desire to cloak their pain, or merely from a sense of decency. But the average married woman is not happy."

"Why then marry at all?" demanded Betty.

"Because the unmarried woman is still unhappier," said Mrs. Garside. "The unmarried woman almost invariably longs for the status of marriage. Pride in the status of being married, that is pride that some man has been willing to shoulder the responsibility of her support, is one of the tricks to which the married woman

has resorted as an offset for her unhappiness. Her failure to attain that position seems to the unmarried a shameful thing. The desire to be loved is nothing but injured vanity, although it is the fashion to ascribe this desire to sentimental reasons. Then, of course, the burden of self-support rests on her shoulders. In these two points the married sister is more fortunate than her unmarried sister, and in addition she has her children. And the joys of motherhood, Betty, compensate for and reconcile a woman to much."

"I do not see how a woman can love her children if she does not love her husband," Betty said bluntly. "Besides, I do not like children."

Betty spoke the truth. Young children were offensive to her. Dainty youngsters of over three or four, clad in fine raiment and freshly washed, she thought adorable. They were so decorative. But infants revolted her. The slobbery bibs, the squirming red hands, the wrinkled red monkey faces nauseated her. It is a feeling not unusual among girls of unemotional natures in whom the sex instinct, and consequently the mother impulse, which is merely an extension or modification of the sex instinct, is either latent or atrophied.

"You would like your own," said Mrs. Garside.

"I don't want children." Betty's face was crimson. "Mother, I am going to tell you the truth." She paused, as if the truth with which she was threatening her mother was a gigantic horror. "I wouldn't marry any man who wants children. I wouldn't marry anyone unless I knew that he was the right sort of man,—I mean a man who wouldn't insist on having that sort of relations with his wife."

"What?" Mrs. Garside fairly gasped. "There are no men of that sort." She was appalled by her child's abysmal innocence.

"I don't believe it," Betty retorted in the hard, brittle tone of youth when youth's fondest dreams are questioned. "I am sure there are. I know there are."

*"Know?"*

"Mother, there are lots of young couples now-a-days who have no children." Betty's tone was the tone in which the young launch an unanswerable argument.

Mrs. Garside's amazement eclipsed the amazement she had felt a moment before. She said very quietly,

"That probably just happened so, Betty." She wanted to say more, but when she looked at Betty's pale, fine face, her resolution flickered away.

"You mean——?" said Betty.

"Yes, dear."

Betty said no more. Her lips compressed themselves into a straight, firm line. It was plain that she still held to her preposterous belief in the sexlessness of man in isolated instances.

Betty was entirely dressed now, except that she had not yet slipped on her dress. She stood, in filmy white petticoat and underdress, a vision of entrancing loveliness, her merciless young eyes fixed with passionate intensity upon her mother's face, on which showed alarm and determination. The mother and daughter stood thus confronting each other; each was sincere, each determined to have her own way. If the daughter had found the mother more clever than she had suspected a little earlier in the interview, the mother was now aghast at the extraordinary mixture of thoughts inhabiting her daughter's head; such unbelievable ignorance existing side by side with a dangerous temerity of speech was assuredly most unusual.

Mother and daughter had lived in close proximity to each other. Now, to their surprise, they found that in one of the great vital matters of life they were strangers.

Neither could understand the other's viewpoint, neither could sympathize with the other's outlook. To the mother there was pathos inconceivable in the situation, and the pang it occasioned her was a spiritual birthpang. Her child, by her sudden assumption of independence in thought and independent emotion had wrested herself away from the mother organism. Pathos too, for the mother, was in the pitiful clinging of the daughter to her own fantastic belief in her ideal of manhood.

The mother felt that at all costs she must show her child the irresponsibility of the emotions. The daughter felt a sort of contemptuous pity for the mother who at forty had so completely forgotten the feelings of eighteen.

"At any rate," Betty said, "I won't marry a man I do not love. Not if he were as rich as John D."

Mrs. Garside took heart. Perhaps Betty's imbecile belief had sprung merely from the lips, not from convictions. Girls, to save their modesty, as Mrs. Garside remembered, make unaccountable statements sometimes. The child possibly was equipped with the normal instincts of womanhood after all.

"Betty," she said gravely, "a woman simply must learn to restrain her likes and dislikes. Let me remind you of an episode of your childhood, which you have probably forgotten.

"You detested carrots. They agreed with you perfectly, but you refused to eat them. The average mother would have said to herself: 'There are lots of wholesome vegetables which the child likes. I will not force her to eat what she does not care for.' I realized, however, that life is made up largely of having to do and endure unpleasant things, and I felt that the sooner I taught you to restrain yourself and to control your likes and dislikes, the better for you. So I promised you a

gold watch if you would learn to eat a small dish of carrots twice a week with good grace. Because you wanted the watch, you taught yourself to eat the carrots, and I noticed that now, since you are a grown-up young woman, you eat them when they are served as if you relished them.

"Now, my Betty, I want you to regard the marriage which appears so odious to you in much the same way as a dish you dislike, but which, for the sake of expediency, you partake of twice or thrice a week. The test of true breeding is not merely to enjoy what we like in moderation, but to endure what we detest with good grace. I would not ask you to marry a man who was a profligate or no gentleman. But Mr. Pidgin is a gentleman, and he will not make things unduly hard for you."

Betty said in a still, frightened voice:

"Mother, I cannot. His hands are so horrible. You know how I am about a person's hands, mother."

Betty might have forgiven Mr. Pidgin's avoirdupois, and general ungainliness. But she could not condone his red, rough, coarse hands. She had all the aristocrat's horror of an unprepossessing hand. She read in the hand an index of its owner's mentality, moral fibre and everything else.

"And then——" Betty continued, and stopped, shrinking from giving expression to her thought. She was thinking in monosyllables now. She could not find seemly words to express the ineffable disgust aroused in her by the odor of tobacco and spirituous liquors which clung about this man.

"I cannot marry him, that's all——" Betty resumed. "The thought of having to let him kiss me—the whole business—Oh, it's odious!"

"Betty, a nice girl does not anticipate the intimacies of marriage in imagination."

"Kisses,—are they the intimacies of marriage?" Betty demanded with fine sarcasm. "They are the intimacies of courtship, too. Besides, you yourself spoke of the joys of motherhood. What are they but intimacies of marriage, I would like to know?"

Young Diane outraged in her modesty, Psyche dragged to mundane planes by some would-be earthly lover, could not have presented a more indignant exterior.

"If I spoke of the joys of a mother," said Mrs. Garside, "I did so because the maternal passion is the strongest passion on earth."

Betty looked sharply at her mother. Some quaver in her voice, some trembling of her lip, moved the girl to quick compassion. She did what she had never done before in all her life. She dropped on her knees before her mother.

"Mother," she cried, "isn't filial love as strong? I love you very dearly."

"Filial love." Mrs. Garside spoke scornfully. "When I was your age, Betty, I thought no love was stronger. Then came love for my husband and the other receded and became dim. And now, child, I know there is only one passion on earth worthy of the name—maternal love."

"That's because the others are so long past," Betty said tenderly.

Mrs. Garside said no more. She did not care to pursue the subject with Betty. One of the tragedies of parentage is the discovery of the axiom upon which nature plans and builds her economies, the fundamental fact that each generation, bound hand and foot by nature, must love its own offspring more than it loves its parents.

"Ah, Betty, Betty," pleaded Mrs. Garside. "I would

give the very blood of my body to know that your future is secure."

"And I, Mother, I would beg, starve or work for you. But I will not barter myself in marriage."

"Beg, starve or work—you do not know what you are saying."

"I do, I do," Betty flung back impetuously. "I know that not one of the three would come easy to me. But anything, anything is better than losing one's self-respect and the hope of happiness. Oh, Mother, Mother, I want my happiness and I will have it."

She stood before her mother, her beautiful, strong young arms crossed above the glorious young bosom, her clenched hands forming a pillow for the finely sculptured chin.

"I want my happiness," she repeated. "And I will not be coerced into certain unhappiness. I have the right to take my happiness where I can find it. And I will find it. And I will, I will."

"Betty, Betty, there is no such thing as absolute unhappiness," the mother entreated. "There is a law of compensation for everything that we enjoy. For everyone of the desirable things of life we have to pay by foregoing some other advantage. If I could only make you see it with my eyes. Betty, love lasts only a little while —it wears away, even in the happiest marriages. But money remains. And money means so much. Instead of the momentary intoxication of love, you secure a pleasant and care-free future."

There was a pause. Betty slipped into her dress, but without troubling to button it, sat limply upon the bed.

"You are cursed with a taste for the best things, Betty," Mrs. Garside continued. "You love pictures, books, good music. Oh, my Betty, I wish I had a golden tongue to make you see all this as I see it. Don't

chase after a rainbow, Betty. There is a greater difference between the life which a woman of culture lives who has means to indulge her tastes for the refined and beautiful things of life and the life which a poor man's wife lives, than there is between the life of that poor man's wife and the life of an animal."

Betty jerked herself further into her dress, and began buttoning it. Suddenly she sat down again, as if exhausted by the effort. Her face wore an indescribable expression, an expression in which were mingled disgust, alarm and weakening of purpose. The effect of her mother's words were beginning to tell on her.

Mrs. Garside continued:

"You assure me you are not in love. If I did not know you to be truthful, I would not believe you, because of your obstinate opposition. Betty, child, there are thousands of women to whom love, meaning passion, never comes. I wish, dear, you would have understood this without being told by me. Most girls do. I think, from what you said before, that you may be one of the women who are temperamentally incapable of feeling what is commonly designated as love."

Betty clenched her fists. Her mother ignored the danger signal.

"Then again, yours may be an emotional nature. It seems curious, that I, your mother, should know so little about my own child. I must grope in the dark in arguing with you.

"And if you have temperament, Betty, has it occurred to you that you may never meet the right man? What is all this talk about the one man and the one woman? You are an intelligent girl. Granting then, for the sake of argument, that every one has an affinity, is it likely that out of the millions of young men in the world precisely the right man is going to walk into your life at the right

moment? What is termed 'love' is nature. Few women, few men for that matter, see perfection in their life-partners. Women, more than men, to save their self-respect and pride, cloak their coldness of feeling under pretty phrases invented for the purpose. They speak of respect and affection, and in truth, my Betty, some sense and meaning lurks behind these terms. One thing is certain. To the woman who has passionately loved her husband and to the woman who has regarded her spouse with coldness, love in a few years simply resolves itself into a sense of conjugal duty. I have heard this too often, Betty, not to know."

Betty sighed deeply, and rising, buttoned her dress methodically.

"Will you think it over, Betty?"

"Very well—but that is not a promise."

"Very good. You had better not come down for breakfast. It might be awkward for you to meet Mr. Pidgin before everything is arranged. I will say you have a headache."

"But I haven't," said Betty. "And I'm as hungry as a wolf."

"Well, it won't hurt you to go without your breakfast this once. It may do you good. I think you have gained a little since we came here. I don't want you to lose your sylph-like slimness. Your waistline looks a little larger."

"If I'm to marry Mr. Pidgin," Betty pouted, "I don't see that it matters whether my waistline is nineteen or twenty-nine. He would have no right to complain if it were thirty-nine."

Mrs. Garside laughed. Betty's pleasantry promised well.

"After breakfast," she said, "I want you out of the way. Go over to the stable loft and practice." The

piano for practice purposes was kept in this singular place so that the occupants of the house would not be disturbed by the noise. "I have ordered some new music from Telfer's. They have desk room in the drug-store at the village this year, you know, and the young man in charge promised to have it up here by nine this morning."

"Oh, very well," said Betty. Practicing on an empty stomach did not seem particularly alluring.

The breakfast bell rang. Mrs. Garside put a finishing touch to her own toilet, and went from the room.

## CHAPTER III

Betty stood in silence for a few moments. Then, stooping, she pulled the volume of Swinburne from under her pillow, and seated herself near the window. It seemed profanation, in view of the commerce-drenched talk with her mother, to open these intoxicating pages. Betty swallowed hard. She was very near crying, as she perceived with chagrin, for her tearlessness was one of the qualities upon the possession of which this young aristocrat prided herself.

To calm herself she went to the window, and removing the screen, seated herself on the window-sill. Her room was on the first sleeping floor and looked out upon the roof of the large porch, where the boarders congregated at all hours of the day except at mealtime. Her window was the last in the row, except one. Beyond that, the roof fell away abruptly, disclosing an elbow of the piazza which ran out at right angles from the main veranda to meet the driveway and walk.

Betty, owing to her abbreviated sleep of the night before, felt a sudden spasm of abnormal hunger. On the spur of the moment she decided to call to the bell boy to get her a box of chocolates, and fetch it to her room. She dared not go down for it herself, fearing to encounter the redoubtable Mr. Pidgin.

She began calling "Richard, Richard!" He was standing at the door of the reading room, abutting upon the elbow of the piazza, evidently speaking to someone. He turned, and was about to walk away.

"Richard, Richard," she called again.

The young man stopped, looked up at Betty and smiled bewitchingly. Betty started back in surprise rather than alarm. The young man whom she had hailed so familiarly as "Richard" was not the bell-boy at all. He was taller, and older, and—Betty's breath came in spurts,—very much handsomer.

Betty did not hazard to explain her mistake to herself. The break, she felt, was inexcusable.

When she regained her self possession, which, for a moment, had basely deserted her, it seemed to her that she had lived ages. Thoughts pelted her like hailstones, coming from without in wild turmoil, not evolved from within. Before he spoke, she knew that the young man's voice would be as music to her ear, that to have him read to her one of the sweet, delightful poems of the night before would be the height of felicity. All this she thought, and more—so madly did the cauldron boil wherein are fused thought and emotion before the stranger, whom she had hailed familiarly as Richard, spoke.

"Richard is my name," he said. "And though I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance, I trust you will allow me to render you the service for which you desired to requisition the other Richard."

There kindled in his eyes the light of admiration which Betty had seen in the eyes of many men before; but, for the first time, it was not disagreeable to her. And again eons sped past, while a moment of sweet delirium lasted. Thus was Oberon's prophecy fulfilled:

> *The first thing which she waking looks upon,*
> *On busy monkey, or on meddling ape.*

But this young man had nothing about him of the monkey or the ape. He was stalwart, straight of limb, and

clean-cut; the deep red dyed his cheeks the color of the blush rose, his eyes were blue and honest, his brown hair promised softness of touch to caressing fingers, and, as if nature had repented of making too pretty a presentment of a man, his nose stood out from his face a bit awry. Betty saw and did not disapprove. So great was the divine madness that had fallen upon her that architecturally proper noses, noses whose angles were true and plumb, noses raising themselves in orthodox fashion from the face would henceforth be abhorred by Betty.

Then, she was delighted to see that with fine courtesy he anticipated her in acknowledging that she had mistaken him for someone else, instead of forcing upon her the embarrassment of an explanation.

"You are very kind," Betty said. "I couldn't think of troubling you. Unless, indeed, you wouldn't mind calling the Richard whom I wanted. He is sweeping the piazza, probably."

"Not here."

"On the other side of the piazza?"

"I would hear his footsteps."

"Then I will wait."

"If it is an urgent matter——?"

"Not at all." Betty would rather have died a hundred deaths than acknowledge possessing anything so vulgar and carnal as an appetite. At that moment, the book, with which she had been playing nervously, slipped from her fingers, and began flip flapping down the slanting roof of the piazza. A letter which she had placed in it as a book-mark fell from the scattering pages and hopped, flew and skipped down to the runnel whither it was followed by the somersaulting book.

"Oh," said Betty.

Richard the stranger laughed.

"I'll get it for you in a minute." He disappeared. Betty heard the clicking of something hard upon wood, and the next moment his head reappeared, this time below the roof. He swung himself easily from the post up which he had climbed upon the roof itself.

"Here I am," he said, "and over there is the book."

The book, the wind lapping through its pages, lay some two yards away from him. He crawled cautiously along the edge of the roof, secured both book and letter, and regained his first position on the roof. Betty besought him nervously not to attempt to crawl upward along the ledge of the roof.

"I shall have to take it down to the office, and have them send it up to you, unless you happen to have a long string.

"You tie a pebble or something heavy to one end to weight it down and then you throw the weight to me. That will enable me to tie the string around the book, so you can haul it in. That's the way they save people's lives in fire and shipwreck."

"Oh, yes, of course," said Betty. She was delighted with the idea. She went to search for some cord, and found a stout string.

"I have no pebble," she said.

"Anything else will do."

"A box of matches?"

"Not heavy enough."

"A paper-weight?"

"Too heavy."

"What then?"

"Oh, a jack-knife, or a pair of scissors."

Betty was delighted with the stranger's fertility of thought. She procured her little silver embroidery scissors, tied it to a string and sped back to the window to hurl the weighted string to the stranger. She found him

sitting crosslegged on the roof, the open volume of Swinburne on his knees, reading. And while he read he ran his fingers through his hair uninterruptedly. They were beautiful fingers, long, slim and tapering, like a woman's, and his hand was without a blemish. Betty gazed with rapture at the young man. He had come up to her from the garden-walk, but he might as well have dropped from the clouds. Men's hands were usually things to shudder at—coarse, uncared for, ungainly things, but the young stranger's hands were quite perfect.

"Don't you love Swinburne?" he asked, as without warning from Betty, the embroidery scissors flipped down upon the open page before him.

"I adore him," Betty replied in the tone in which we speak of a long cherished possession. It seemed to her that she had travelled miles since yesternight.

Instead of tying the string about the book, as he had agreed to do, the young man became contemplative. He rushed into an impassioned eulogy on Swinburne, and he was full of his subject. He explained to Betty that Swinburne had been a Grecian, rather than a Greek, that the Greek outlook upon life and love and beauty had seemed so beautiful to him that to see things thus had become second nature to him. His joy in the sky, the clouds, the night, the rain, the earth had been augmented a hundredfold by the purely intellectual pleasure of viewing them through Greek glasses. Like the Greeks, too, he worshipped art rather than life. Like the Greeks, the manifold manifestations of life interested him not primarily because they were segments of life, but because they were subjects for art to exploit. Therefore, like the Greeks, he adhered to an exaggerated love of form, of statuesque beauty, of polished serenity in dealing with even the most frantic passions, the wildest emotions, the most violent heart-burnings. This repres-

sion in a modern of the modern instinct for sacrificing form to emotion, gave to his poetry an exotic charm. Mad thoughts, expressed in harmonious language, lost the sense of panting, raving madness. Rhythm, exploited by him with an adroitness which no poet, ancient or modern, had rivalled, assumed the hue of magic, and the witchery of carefully compounded alliteration superimposed upon the enchantment woven by the rhythm drugged the intellect and sharpened the perception of the senses.

Having exhausted the subject, he opened the book.

"May I read to you one of my favorite poems?" he asked.

"Certainly."

But she did not listen to the words which the boy, he was little more, was reading to her. She was too full of the wonders which her destiny was scattering about her ears. As the scythe mows away knee-deep grass impeding the landscape, so there was razed away before her spiritual eyes all the trivialities of life which had obscured her outlook. This, at last, was life,—not the miserable, fetid pettiness which had heretofore passed as such.

The boy had closed the book. He was busy tying the string about the book.

"Besides," he said, "Swinburne was an expert on the vital matter of life."

"The vital matter of life?"

"Love," he said simply, "the right woman."

"Or the right man?" she queried.

"It comes to the same thing, doesn't it?"

"Then you believe——" Betty began, and stopped in confusion.

"In what?" he asked.

"That love is an actual thing—that it really exists

. . . . " It seemed incredible that she, Betty Garside, was having this marvellous adventure.

"Yes," he said, without levity, "I think it is the only actual thing in the world."

"I did not know," she hazarded, her words almost unintelligible, so fearful was she of the thought to which she was about to give expression. "I did not know it was thus with a man."

The young man became greatly excited. Evidently he had many convictions and opinions and ideals, and she had rubbed roughly over one of them.

"That's just it," he cried. "The world would be so much happier if men and women would only realize that there is only one thing which is worth while—love, the real, genuine, to-the-death love, you know."

"Perhaps it doesn't really mean so much to most men."

"It must. It cannot be otherwise. A fellow meets a lot of bright, pretty, fascinating girls. He likes them immensely, but he knows right along that not one of them is *the* woman. It isn't a matter of complexion, or wit, or beauty. It's something deeper. And then, one day, when he least expects it, he meets the right girl, and if she is the girl, the one woman, you know, he realizes it in a twinkling. And no mistake."

"I didn't know," murmured Betty.

"You knew it as being true of a girl, of yourself, didn't you?" the question was an entreaty.

"I hardly know," faltered Betty, feeling that she was being taken by storm.

"You didn't believe in love at first sight?"

"I never thought about it before."

"Think about it now," he begged. "Well?"

"I dare say you are right," Betty's eyelashes dropped, and the young man sighed as if he were

sighing away his soul with sheer joy in their length and sweep.

"And doesn't it make all the difference in the world?" he asked.

"For a girl more than for a man, I imagine."

She spoke with a passion of emphasis, and, as always when deeply stirred, she crossed her arms over her bosom, and dropped her chin upon her crossed hands.

He divined that there had been a recent tragedy of some sort in the life of this adorable creature, and realized that, no matter how candid she would be with him in generalizing upon the moods and fancies of the heart, reticence, modesty and breeding would not permit her to particularize specific facts.

"A good many fellows never meet the right girl," he continued. "I can tell you if a chap does meet her, it is going to give him an impetus to make good compared with which ambition is nothing."

"To make good at what?"

"Oh, whatever he is tinkering away at. To make good so that he has a right to approach her—has a right to win her."

Betty's eyes shone, her face was radiant. A similar mutation had occurred in the young man's appearance. By leaps and bounds, lightning-wise, they had reached the point where generalities are accepted and understood to be personalities. With charming naïveté, a naïveté of which only unspoiled and virginal natures are capable, they were not in the least ashamed of the intense interest with which they inspired each other.

"You see," the boy continued, "a chap wants to be everything to that girl—everything. . . ." he stopped modestly, and then continued as if to modify any brutality which she might imagine he had intended to con-

vey but of which he was guiltless, ". . . he wants to feel that the mere fact of his existence makes her existence worth while and lifts it from merest commonplace to the noble heights of real life."

"Then it's not selfish, or vain, to want someone to care for you like that?"

"Selfish? Vain? Who told you that?" He demanded almost viciously. "Why, it's that feeling of being indispensable to someone, of feeling you are needed by someone, that underlies every manly and womanly quality."

He became greatly agitated, and Betty implored him to be careful not to fall off the roof. Then, suddenly, the humor of their conversation between window-sill and roof occurred to them, and they laughed long and merrily. Forgetting the haven of abstractions in which they had been navigating so assiduously, they glorified in the mere fact of being alive, of being together, of having discovered each other. There fell a pause, a pause during which they looked at each other frankly, and their looks seemed to bring them nearer together than words, or handclasp, or touch of lips.

He was the first to speak.

"I forgot to put your letter in the book," he said, and tried to shove it into the book between cover and fly-page. In doing so, he glimpsed the name and address.

"Miss Garside?" he asked. "Then you are the young lady I brought the music for from Telfer's. I'm running Telfer's summer branch up here, as an experiment, you know."

"And you had to come up the mountain on account of my music?"

"It was a treat." The compliment, now that he had paid it, frightened him, and he covered his indiscretion neatly by saying:

"You see, the druggist allows me to ride his horse any time in the morning before ten, and when there's a place to ride to, it makes it so much pleasanter."

"It's nice to be able to ride," said Betty. It was an accomplishment she lacked, and one which she had always wished to possess.

"You have a finer accomplishment."

"What?"

"You must be a pretty fair pianist to be able to play the music I brought you."

"I'm too indolent, I'm afraid, to ever learn how to play well. Do you play?"

"Rather."

"That means that you play well."

"If I were to admit that it would be inviting your censure if I were ever fortunate enough to play for you."

"Oh, I do want to hear you after that."

"I shall work hard in anticipation of that day."

"You have worked hard in the past, haven't you?" He did not reply, and she added entreatingly after a short pause, as if to cajole him into a confidence by using child's slang:

"Honest Injun?"

"Honest Injun, I have."

"Tell me all about it," she begged, settling herself comfortably on the window-sill. It was his turn to caution her against headlong precipitation from the roof. Again their laughter rang out clear and distinct. When it had abated, he began:

"To go abroad and study is my most cherished desire. At least, it was my greatest wish until this morning." This time he did not attempt to obliterate the impression of having paid her a compliment, but looked at her with frank admiration beaming from his blue eyes.

"Perhaps you will be able to go some day."

"Perhaps." And unaffectedly, with charming candor, he told her that he had been "saving his pennies" and had over a thousand dollars in the bank now. He called this his "Europe fund." When he reached the fifteen hundred mark he was going abroad for three years. He spoke modestly, without self-vaunting, but a new element had suddenly crept into his manner. He wound up with:

"I don't want to be a nobody all my life. I want to be someone, somebody."

He stopped abruptly, bent forward and listened.

"Sss," he said. "They are beginning to get up from the table. I had better go. It might be awkward for you, you know—this situation——"

She thanked him with her eyes. He flung the book upward, she hauled it in dexterously, then he swung down from the roof. For a moment he hung in mid-air. Then, with the footing which a friendly pillar afforded to steady himself upon, he remarked:

"The drug-store at which Telfer's hangs out has excellent soda-water."

Betty laughed.

His shoulders were no longer visible, but the handsome head, with its bright patches of red cheek and dark shock of hair, still appeared above the roof. Suddenly his hand shot upward and waved a good-bye. He declaimed sententiously:

"Parting is such sweet sorrow, that I could part all day till it be morrow." And then, as Betty caught her breath sharply, he flung her a kiss with his hand. She had a vague sensation that, for dignity's sake, she ought to frown. But there was no resisting the merry, honest blue eyes and their mischievous glances. Once more he re-emerged, and said gravely:

"Romeo always does that in the play, you know."

Then he extinguished himself. Betty, in her heart, blessed him for that ultimate phrase which had robbed his conduct of every vestige of impudence.

She had occasion to rejoice once more in his discretion. The voices which he had heard in the hall were now on the veranda, and as he mounted his horse and rode past Betty's window, he did not so much as glance in her direction.

Could a prince have shown a finer courtesy?

Betty abased herself before him in spirit. She wove airy fantasies about him. What did he do at Telfer's? Who was he? Did he have much talent? Genius, perhaps? She remembered with a start that she did not even know his surname. Her imagination was on fire. It did not burn as one substantial holocaust, but shot out myriad little tongues of flame simultaneously—all eager, all ardent, all dying away so quickly as to be almost indistinguishable. She could not capture the fugitive and transient thoughts that came to her regarding this young man; as well hope to carry home a slice of the ocean in a shad net because it circumvallated water while stretched in the sea from its stakes.

With a start she realized that her mother was in the room. Betty had completely forgotten the formidable Pidgin. Now she remembered him overwhelmingly.

"The music has come from Telfer's," her mother announced, handing Betty a package, and Betty, who had never equivocated before, said in a tone of agreeable surprise:

"Oh, has it?"

She laid the volume of Swinburne down under the slender package containing the sheet music, so as to be able to slip it under her arm unperceived by her mother.

So quickly did equivocating act follow equivocating word.

Betty went to the door.

"By the way," said her mother, making a footnote of the matter of prime importance, "have you thought the matter over?"

"What matter?" Betty inquired nonchalantly, though her heart beat high at expectation of a fray.

Mrs. Garside frowned.

"Mr. Pidgin, and the marriage."

"Yes, I have thought it over. I've got to be true to myself, mother. I'd lose my self-respect if I married him."

"Self-respect! True to yourself! Don't be theatrical, Betty."

"Well, then, untheatrically, I won't, I can't, I shan't."

"If you had not given me your word that there was no other man, I would think such wilfulness would be due to nothing but a previous attachment."

"Well," said Betty, "I did give you my word, didn't I? I have never lied to you, you know." She wondered vaguely whether she was lying now. "I am going to the barn to practice," she said, and rapidly made her exit.

She had no intention of practicing. She meant to think over the occurrences of the morning. She wanted to think and think hard about Richard of the Unknown Surname. But she had hardly settled herself comfortably in the barn loft, which, though it smelt vilely of cows and horses, seemed a sumptuous abode to Betty that morning, because it permitted continuity of thought, when one of the maids came to summon her to return to the house, as her mother wished to see her at once.

With a sigh, Betty left her comfortable chair, and leisurely returned to the house. She supposed her mother

wanted to reopen the Pidgin matter. She hardly cared. She was busy thinking of the Stranger. She remembered his every movement, gesture and mannerism so vividly that she seemed almost to see him. She loved his handsome hands, with their slender, long, nervous, tapering fingers, dainty and well-kept as a woman's, yet masculinely strong. They were ideal pianist's hands, as she was enough of a musician to know. She wondered how he played, and told herself immediately afterwards that he could not possibly play other than well. She wondered whether his last name was euphonious; whether he thought as much of her as she was thinking of him.

Betty found her mother sitting in her own room with a large, official-looking envelope in one hand, a typewritten letter in the other. She was the picture of dismay.

"Betty!"

"Yes, mother?"

"The copper mining company, *our* mining company, is insolvent."

Betty said nothing. She looked at her mother uncomprehendingly.

"That means, child, that we are ruined."

"Won't you get anything?"

"Nothing. It means that all we have in the world is the pittance I have in the bank and the few bills I have in my purse—some three hundred dollars in all."

Still Betty stared at her mother mutely. She realized what her mother was about to say to her and she wanted to ward it off, she wanted to speak, but her tongue seemed wrapped about heavily, as in a wet blanket.

"Betty, I renew my entreaties concerning Mr. Pidgin. This failure means going to work, and that as

quickly as work is to be had, unless you will accept Mr. Pidgin."

"I told you before that I am perfectly willing to work, and I was quite sincere in saying that," said Betty.

"I know, my dear, but you will not be able to earn enough to support us both. I will have to go to work, too."

"No, no, mother, that's not to be thought of."

"I will have to think of it, nevertheless, Betty, unless——"

Betty became very white. She thought the pressure her mother was exerting unfair and selfish. She was too young to realize that her mother was not putting forth this appeal because she feared hardship for herself, but because she knew that her daughter would fear hardship for the mother rather than for herself. It was in reality a very high tribute Mrs. Garside was paying Betty in attacking her as she was doing.

"What am I to do?" Betty asked in a heartbroken voice.

"Betty, my daughter, listen to me. You expressed the belief before that filial devotion is as strong as maternal love. Let me tell you of an occurrence of which you know nothing, and after I have told you the story, you can prove to me, if you wish, that your contention is right." She paused a moment, then asked swiftly:

"Do you recall Mr. Ogden, whom we met last winter at Lakewood?"

"Do I?" Eyes of mother and daughter met, and there arose before their mind's eye the face of a man pinched and withered, marked as much by vice as by disease, a creature utterly repulsive and loathsome.

"Betty, he was extremely wealthy,—much wealthier than Mr. Pidgin."

"Very wealthy, mother, and very vile. Did he want to marry me, too?"

"He did, Betty. I had tried to deflect his attentions to myself. I would have married him willingly for your sake, if he had been a thousand times more horrible than he was."

"Oh, mother, dear, how could you?"

"My maternal love, child, would have made it possible. I would have stifled my loathing, but I failed, failed lamentably. You perceive, Betty, how perishable is that asset which I am begging you to make use of in your own case."

"Oh, mother, don't, don't talk like that."

"You are too young, Betty, to realize what marriage to a man like Ogden means for a woman. I would have seen you dead before I would have consented to let you marry him. Yet I would have endured the ignominy of such a union, would have risked the probable wrecking of my health for the sake of procuring for you the advantages which wealth bestows and the possibility of allowing you your own choice of a husband."

Betty looked up quickly; she did not understand what her mother had reference to in speaking of the possible wrecking of her health; she was to wonder a good deal about it in the future. Her mother's manner even more than her words had softened Betty, and she asked gently:

"Before you said love didn't matter? Now it seems you think it does, after all."

Mrs. Garside said wearily:

"It doesn't matter—in the end. But I suppose the illusion is pleasant while it lasts. For the sake of letting my little girl have her illusory start, I was willing, nay eager, to sell myself. But I failed. I failed."

Mrs. Garside's voice had become very pathetic. Betty's nerves were snapping. She felt that she must go insane if her mother said "I failed" just once more

in the same pathos-laden tone. Suddenly she realized that her mother was waiting for her to say something, was waiting for her decision. A strange feeling of fear crept through her as she realized that upon her answer depended her mother's future. If she refused her mother might have to stand behind a counter, matching ribbons or fitting gloves, and there arose before her inward vision the faces of innumerable saleswomen whom she had seen in the large shops or on the street, hurrying to work in the cold dawn of a winter's morning. She shuddered. She could not endure the thought that her mother should be dragged to such a pitiable level.

With the impetuousness of youth she felt that this last alternative was the most intolerable of all. She said abruptly:

"I will marry Mr. Pidgin."

Mrs. Garside closed her eyes, and sighed deeply.

"Thank Heaven," she said. "Thank Heaven."

Betty misunderstood the exclamation. She took it as an evidence of the grossest, most callous selfishness. She was making the biggest sacrifice of which a woman is capable for her mother, and all her mother said was "Thank Heaven." Betty reflected that it was herself, Betty, not Heaven, whom her mother should have thanked by rights.

Filled with bitterness, but not wishing to betray her anger, she sprang from her chair and flounced out of the room. Her mother called after her, but Betty pretended not to hear.

She went down to the piazza, and sat down in a corner where the conversation was in full swing, and her coming, in consequence, would cause no comment. Presently her mother appeared. Anxious-eyed, her glance trailed up and down the long piazza until it lo-

cated Betty. Then her face brightened. She came and stood near Betty, who felt constrained to offer her mother a chair. But instead of sitting down, her mother drew Betty's arm through her own, forcing her to walk with her, away from the chattering group of women.

"Betty," she said, "Mr. Pidgin has just asked me to drive around the mountain with him." Driving around the mountain was the favorite pursuit on a hot day at Penascapet, probably because it was the only drive on level ground in that locality. "The dog-cart will be here in ten minutes. You'll stand pat?"

"Yes, mother, I'll stand pat."

"He will probably want to get married early in the fall. Are you willing—so soon?"

"Some girls when they have a toothache," Betty said, "keep putting off their visit to the dentist as long as possible. I always go right off. I like to get through with disagreeable things. You can hand me over to my new owner next week, if you wish."

Until now Betty had always answered plain "Yea" and "Nay," but the suffering she had undergone in the last hour had whipped her imagination into seeking an outlet for her anguish in metaphor and irony. Her mother looked at her in alarm. The pale, high-bred face was a shade paler than usual. It seemed aged. The girl had receded into the background, the woman was in the ascendant. The tense, psychic experience she had lived through had heightened the quality of repose, which she always possessed, to an unnatural degree. She had more aplomb than her mother, as her mother saw with something akin to dismay.

"Betty," said her mother, with a warmth very unusual in her, "kiss me, child."

"I cannot kiss you now, mother."

"It is for your best. Do not be angry with me."

"Angry?" The girl's resentment overflowed. "Angry? Heaven forgive me—I hate you for this, mother."

Mrs. Garside caught her breath with a sharp intake. She was about to retort when a voice, a voice that held all heaven in its cadences for Betty, interrupted them.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Garside,—the druggist where Telfer has his stand had some medicine to deliver here, and I brought it for him. As there was some new music in this morning's mail, I brought it with me, thinking you would like to see it. Keep it till to-morrow and if you don't want it, send it back by the mail-wagon."

Mrs. Garside smiled.

"Betty," she said, "this is Mr. Pryce, of Telfer's."

Betty smiled in acknowledgment of the introduction. She admired the shrewdness with which Richard, no longer the Unknown, had managed to place himself upon a footing of respectable acquaintanceship with her. She admired his adroitness in subterfuge. She admired the astuteness with which he kept his eyes averted from her face, as if fearing to betray their secret. She admired his manner of easy self-possession in addressing her mother. Last of all, she again admired his hands, the hands of which she had been dreaming ever since she had first seen them that morning.

Mrs. Garside thanked him and said they required no more music at present. Richard, no longer the Unknown, lifted his hat and bade her and Betty a good-morning. Just as he mounted his horse, Mr. Pidgin drove up in the dog-cart, and Betty, to escape speaking to him, turned to go to the house.

"Good-bye, Betty," said her mother.

"Good-bye, mother."

She ran to her room, and from her window watched the dog-cart scuttle off at a brisk pace. She tried to

compose herself, but seeing the two men in juxtaposition, as she had seen them a minute before, made the ordeal awaiting her seem doubly cruel. Richard's voice rang in her ears, and she thought how gently he would clasp the hand of the woman he loved. Her head seemed on fire. She thought that her agony must be visible in her face, but when Louise passed under her window, giggling because she had found a red lizard, Louise waved her hand to Betty as if nothing unusual was to be seen in her lineaments.

A half-hour passed, and suddenly Betty's anxiety passed away. A conviction swept over her that she would not have to marry Mr. Pidgin after all. Some miracle was bound to intervene, though she could not have said what that miracle would be. Betty had the optimism of the artistic temperament, which is hugely different from the optimism of the democratic mind. The democrat has faith in the future, because he has faith in his own strength and competence in molding that future. But the aristocrat has faith in that future because subconsciously he believes that nature and fortune must join hands in being kind to one as finely fibred as himself.

Betty was certain some miracle would happen in her behalf. While she was nursing this agreeable belief, there sounded on the piazza voices raised to the pitch of intense excitement. Subsequently the dead silence was followed by a sob from Louise. Betty knew it was Louise sobbing because Louise always sobbed at the first intimation of a thunderstorm and kept on sobbing until the storm had passed. Betty looked out at the sky. There was not a cloud to be seen.

She went to the door, meaning to go downstairs to see what had happened to Louise, but as she opened the door she found Louise's mother standing there, at

the threshold, in the attitude of someone about to knock.

"Betty," said Louise's mother, "may I come in?" Betty stood aside, her sense of wonder growing, for Louise's mother had never called her Betty before. She was a stately, handsome woman of dignified manner, but Betty saw that she was trembling violently as from suppressed excitement.

"Betty—something terrible has happened."

There are moments when prescience speaks as plainly as words.

"What has happened to my mother?" Betty asked. "Is she dead?"

"Yes." Mrs. Reynolds tried to tell Betty what had happened, but her courage failed her. Again and again she essayed the task. It was Betty, quiet, tearless, composed—Betty, who had told her mother half an hour prior to her death that she hated her—who got the story from her piecemeal.

The road "around the mountain" was being repaired, and the workmen had forgotten to place a danger signal on a new piece of road running over a bank of shale. The shale was not yet underpropped, and as the swiftly moving vehicle passed over it, the soft, mushy stuff crumbled away like sand, sending the dog-cart down a precipice two hundred feet deep. Both Mr. Pidgin and her mother had been instantly killed.

## CHAPTER IV

They were all very kind to Betty, overwhelmingly, unbelievably, crushingly kind. They were horribly worried because Betty did not cry, or give signs of violent emotion. They stood about in the hall, on the veranda, in the garden walks, asking each other, "Has she cried yet?"

Betty did not cry. The feeling that was uppermost in Betty these days was horror. Her grief was submerged by acute self-reproach. She had told her mother that she hated her a brief half-hour before her death. She had said nothing to mitigate that statement. The thought of this drove her almost insane, and she could not escape from it. She remembered how the feeling had come to her that a miracle was being enacted in her behalf to save her from the hated marriage, and the miracle that actually was saving her was the tragedy involving her mother's death.

Through the interstices of this torrent of self-reproach and pain she perceived a face, like a face seen on the other side of the street through a November fog under the ghostly glare of an electric light. And the face was Richard Pryce's.

She had the conviction that Richard Pryce would come to her, whether on some pretext or scornful of any pretext, she did not know. She knew that those slender fingers of his would hold her hands in his before many days had passed by. She knew that to have her hands clasped by his would bring her unspeakable comfort. She could see the curious gleam in his eyes

when the spirit quickened in them. And she had a singular sensation of being part and parcel of him, of being his, of belonging to him, and this feeling swept over her again and again. She had never even touched his hands, and yet it seemed to her that she had touched them a thousand times. He had never kissed her cheek, and she, so undemonstrative and aloof, knew that it was merely a matter of time before he would kiss her; knew, furthermore, that she would like him to kiss her.

She told herself that the breach she was committing against decency in harboring these thoughts so shortly after her mother's death was monstrous. The innumerable sacrifices her mother had made for her came back to her. She remembered a pretty blue dress which her mother had sewed for her at night, after she was through with the day's work which brought money into the family till. She remembered what her mother had said about the difference between maternal and filial love, and then for the first time she wept, wept with a passion and an abandon that brought her to the threshold of hysterics. And at that moment, if she could have brought her mother back, knowing that she must contract a hateful marriage, she would willingly have made the sacrifice.

Mrs. Reynolds telegraphed her husband, and at considerable inconvenience to himself, he answered the summons and came up to Penascapet. He took charge of the funeral, attending to all arrangements necessary for conveying the body to the family plot in New York, where Mrs. Garside's parents were buried. Mrs. Reynolds went to New York with Betty, and brought her back the same night to Penascapet, while Mr. Reynolds attended to Betty's business matters for her, and on seeing how meagre was the bank account, paid part of the funeral expenses himself, instructing the under-

taker to send Betty a bill for the balance as if it were the entire bill.

Last of all, he offered Betty a home in his family. He was a self-made man, and had a habit of pinching his daughters' cheeks. To Betty, he had always seemed coarse and familiar, and she had wondered to see the caresses his two daughters bestowed on him of a Saturday evening when he arrived from the city.

"You're much too pretty, my dear," he said, "to go out to earn your own living. You had better make your home with us for the present. We will be glad to have another grown-up, attractive daughter in the house, particularly as Emma is being married and that leaves us one daughter short. There's a brigade of young men forever camping on our doorstep, and our second and third daughter will step off like the first. Well, what do you say? Come to us, and we'll marry you off to some prosperous young chap immediately."

Betty winced, but gave no outward sign. She thanked Mr. Reynolds for his kindness, and asked to be permitted to consider his offer. She knew very well that she would never accept it; financial dependence on strangers seemed to her a shameful thing, and besides, she knew that Richard would come to her one day and that her affairs would adjust themselves somehow.

Emma Reynolds was married three days after Mrs. Garside's interment, and the entire house, which had wept and bewailed with Betty at her mother's funeral, laughed and rejoiced at Emma's wedding. This left Betty feeling bewildered and helpless. These people had cried as much as herself, some more than herself, when her mother was taken away, and now they entered with zest and zeal into merrymaking.

Betty had gone to the pavilion merely to see Emma married, and effaced herself immediately afterwards.

She went to her little room, and thought of Richard. She thought of him incessantly these days. She thought of many things. Her mother's terse candor regarding certain matters forced her thoughts into unusual channels and impelled her to give thought to matters which she formerly would not have considered. She felt certain that Richard Pryce was not like other men. To think that when he married it would be with the usual object of matrimony was to sully him. So distasteful did the matter of sex appear to her,—and what her mother had said had rebuttressed this attitude of Betty's,—that all experience, all history, all nature, and her mother's cynicism to the contrary, she believed that Richard Pryce, alone among men, was sexless. That sexlessness was to her the only state of purity possible. When Richard Pryce married, it would be with the same objects in view as herself—companionship, affection, and mutual respect.

And she was certain that he was coming to her.

Her faith in him, at least as regards the last particular, was not misplaced. Early one morning, before the first week of her mourning was over, she saw him coming up the mountain. He was still half a mile away and on horseback, and a moment after she had glimpsed him he was lost from sight behind a clump of elderberry bushes and wild cherry trees. She finished dressing in haste, and walked down the road to meet him. His coming was a high festival to her, and she did not wish her joy in him dissipated by chance interruptions from inquisitive and prying guests.

They came upon each other some ten minutes walk away from the hotel, near a small rustic summer house, standing in a secluded hollow. He jumped from his horse the moment he saw her, and slipping the bridle over his arm, he walked slowly uphill. He was dressed

in a khaki riding habit, which suited his tall, slim figure particularly well, and his tan riding boots, strapped and buckled, gave him a military and commanding appearance which made Betty's heart beat faster. He was hatless, but his entire bearing betokened an indescribable courtesy as he advanced, as if to extenuate the fact that for lack of a hat, he could not give the usual salute upon first catching sight of her.

With a little sob, which she did not attempt to check, Betty held out her hands to him. He dropped the bridle, and possessed himself of the proffered hands.

"Miss Garside," he said, "Miss Betty." She saw that his emotion was no less than hers. No words of commiseration could have betokened greater sympathy. The strong clasp of his fingers seemed to promise protection. As he held her hand, Betty remembered how she had anticipated the touch of his fingers. A feeling of intense peace and security came to her.

"I knew you would come," she said in a low, intimate voice.

"I came as soon as I could," he said. "I have been to New York since I saw you. I wanted to see you, because I had a feeling that you had no relatives, no one, you know, whom you can depend upon to help you."

"A family here at the hotel has been extremely kind," said Betty. "But you are right; I have no relatives, no one in the world." In thought she added the words, "except you." They trembled on her lips. Physical violence, almost, seemed to be necessary to keep them from overflowing. So tense was the moment that she thought she must have spoken them after all. Richard Pryce said quietly:

"Except me."

"Did I say that?" Betty asked, a little frightened.

"Not with your lips," he said. "I have no one in the world, either, except you."

"A lot of good I will be to you," said Betty.

"If I can help you, you will be of more use to me than I to you," he said very seriously. "Don't you remember, dear Miss Betty, that we spoke about that the other day, the feeling of being necessary to someone? Well, this is my chance, my opportunity of making myself indispensable to you, and it is going to make me the happiest man alive."

He had led the way up to the little rustic summer house, while they were talking. Slipping the bridle around a tree trunk, he left the animal to munch laurel leaves and clover, and then returned to Betty's side. Together, side by side, his hand clasping her arm as he helped her up the steps, they walked into the little rustic summer house and sat down. He released her arm. For a moment they sat in silence. She wanted to tell him about her self-reproaches, about the penultimate cruel thing she had said to her mother. She wanted him to exonerate her, to help her forget. But she could not find the right words in which to tell him. And suddenly, while he was looking at her, she began to speak, and told him disjointedly, unconnectedly, with disregard of the context, that she had told her mother she hated her.

"Why?" he asked. "You must tell me what preceded that, you know. You must tell me all about it."

His quiet assumption of gentle authority soothed her immeasurably.

"Because she wanted me to marry someone——" she wanted to say someone else, but stopped herself in time, and again, as before, he completed her thought for her.

"Someone else?"

"Yes."

The question was asked and answered with utmost calmness. Then Richard Pryce said with noble simplicity:

"You must not worry about that. If your mother could see you now, she would understand, and she would be happy that things were arranging themselves for the best. She would know now that you were right and she wrong. You must not worry now."

Again they sat in silence, side by side. It seemed to her that she could hear his heart beat. Or was it only her own? The faint odor of a cigarette hung about him, and she liked it.

Suddenly, at sight of her, her pallor heightened by her mourning, he overflowed with pity.

"You poor little thing," he said, "you poor little thing." Betty lifted her eyes to his face. Some look in his eyes went to her brain and to her heart. The memory of the loneliness and the horror of the days which she had lived fell upon her oppressively. The purely human joy of being in close proximity to some human being she loved swept over her.

Hardly aware of what she was doing, she laid her right hand upon his shoulder, and bending over, laid a kiss upon his cheek. Then, amazed, and more horrified than she would have been if he had kissed her instead, she drew back.

"Don't think me quite, quite horrid," she entreated. "I have been so lonely, and so afraid."

"You poor little thing," he repeated, and then very gently he lifted both her hands to his lips, kissing first the one and then the other with great reverence.

It was fortunate indeed for Betty that the boy with whom she had allowed herself this unconventional behavior was what he was. A woman can make the first advance or offer the first caress with impunity only to

a man of pure heart and untainted mind. A libertine, a man of pleasure, a roué will invariably see in the most innocent caress or advance an offer of complete surrender, because to a man of that calibre every caress has to do with the passions, and the affections are an unknown and uncomprehended quantity. Richard Pryce, however, was pure in mind, unseared in heart, unstained in imagination as Betty herself, and he realized intuitively that in kissing him her spirit had made of her body a medium for its expression. If she had only known it, that kiss of hers consecrated him to her service for life. He was a modest boy. He had never played the Don Juan as some boys do even in their schooldays; he had pilfered no hair-ribbons to display as trophies, had stolen no kisses to boast of as kisses voluntarily yielded to him. No woman had ever kissed him before; nor had he ever desired a woman's kisses. The adventure for him, as for Betty, had all the fragrance and sweetness of first love.

"I have come," he continued bluntly, "to see how you are fixed. I mean, will you have to do something?"

"Yes," said Betty, "I will have to try to find work."

"Then I have an offer to make you."

He spoke quickly, as if anxious to get through with this matter of business on which he had come. He seemed a trifle ashamed of his errand. His employer, Mr. Telfer, had recalled him from Penascapet Summit, because the new venture had not been successful. Telfer's, Fifth Avenue, New York, publisher of songs, librettos, opera scores and sheet music, always engaged the services of a first-class pianist to play new music as well as classical repertory for customers desirous of making pianoforte selections. It was not a disagreeable position. Richard Pryce had met many interesting people, some of them musical celebrities, during his

connection with Telfer's in this capacity, but now, after three years, Mr. Telfer had decided to advance Richard to the position of manager of the circulating music library, which would require virtually his entire time, and his former position was thus falling vacant. On hearing of the death of Betty's mother, it had immediately occurred to Richard that Betty might like the position, and as Mr. Telfer had left the finding of the new incumbent entirely to Richard, he was able to make her the offer. He had asked for a leave of absence of two days for the express purpose of making it in person.

"I can only offer you eighteen a week to start with," he said apologetically. "It is not a fortune, certainly, but you couldn't do better elsewhere. He jumped me from eighteen to thirty in three years, which is not bad. Thirty dollars," he added, "is almost enough to get married on."

"Thirty dollars," Betty said quietly, "ought to help swell the Europe Fund. If you get married, you will not be able to save up for Europe."

"Oh, yes, I will," he said. "I will be earning more in another year. Which will enable me to get married and save up for Europe both."

There was no mistaking the meaning in his words and in his eyes, and to deflect his attention, Betty pointed to a russet and orange chipmunk, who sat on his haunches, his bushy tail standing up like a plume. The little creature, apprehensive of evil, sat perfectly still, looking at Betty in stony fascination.

"Look," said Betty.

But Richard did not look at the chipmunk. He was looking at Betty. If he had filled Betty's head with a hundred and one delicious new thoughts, Betty had filled his heart with a thousand and one delicious new sensa-

tions. Never in all his life had he experienced such a coursing of joy through his entire body. He had supposed that one could feel the body only when in pain, but now he experienced the sensation that to own a body was a supreme and intense pleasure. Ever since he had sat down beside Betty, since he had touched her fingers, and more particularly since he had felt the touch of her soft lips upon his cheek, he had been suffused with an agreeable, drowsy languor very much like the torpor engendered by the heavy old port which he drank on red-letter days—Christmas, New Year's and Thanksgiving. But the languor produced by the wine was heavy and material compared to the ecstasy that was now flooding him, and in spite of which, or because of which he seemed burningly, smartingly, alive. He desired to kiss her, but he told himself that his wish for a kiss as compared to the kiss she had voluntarily given him was gross and raw. He suppressed the desire. He would not have offended her for worlds. He would not have had her think that he was attempting to kiss her, because in an unguarded moment she had allowed him a glimpse of her soul by kissing him. He was humbly eager to make clear to himself the difference between them. She ranked barely below the angels, and he—well, he had discovered quite suddenly that he was no stranger to the feelings inherent in normal manhood. But the discovery did not displease him.

"Do you want the position?" he asked.

"Do I? I should say so."

"Fine. And when are you willing to start?"

"The sooner the better. But look here, Mr.——" she hesitated, appalled by the absurdity of calling him Mr. Pryce. She had thought of him as Richard, and her lips found it difficult to run counter to her thought.

"I say, let me call you Betty, and you call me Rich-

ard, will you? I told Mr. Telfer we were old friends, so it's an innocent hypocrisy we will be acting."

Betty laughed. She became mischievous. She wanted to tantalize him ever so lightly. She had never understood why girls gloated over the silly pranks they played on their boy friends. Suddenly she comprehended.

"I won't call you Richard," she said.

"Please do. Miss Garside, even Miss Betty, is so formal."

"I'll compromise."

"How?"

"I'll call you Dick—or Dicky."

"Dicky?"

"Has anyone ever called you Dicky before?"

"Not a soul."

"Well, then," she cried mischievously, "I'm giving you an individual name, a name that hasn't been hackneyed by every chance acquaintance of yours."

Having said that much, she feared that she had said too much. She blushed furiously.

She looked at him and laughed shyly, confusedly, happily. Suddenly the effort he was making to check himself from kissing her appeared to him in a different light than before. Since she had kissed him, though the kiss had flown to her lips directly from her white little soul, was it not churlish of him to pretend to greater self-command than she had exercised? His soul, too, was sincerely set upon kissing her. He stooped quickly, and brushed her cheek with his lips.

"Dicky, oh, Dicky!"

She looked at him reproachfully.

"I merely returned what I had no right to keep," he explained. They were both blushing. "Betty, I am so happy. As soon as I earn forty dollars a week regu-

larly, and I think that will be very soon, you are going to marry me."

"Such presumption—we have met just three times!"

"We have met three times only, it is true," he said soberly. "But ever since we met the first time, our souls have been inseparable. Mine clove to yours, yours to mine, don't you know that?"

"Yes."

"And you know that you have changed the face of the universe for me?"

"Yes."

"And that nothing can come between us?"

"Yes, yes."

"And you know that I love everything about you?"

"Yes."

"Your soft, drooping hair, and your eyes, Betty, your eyes, which in expression are like a mountain lake before a storm, inscrutable, alluring, mysterious. And I love your soft little white hands, Betty, and your mouth, Betty—I love your mouth because it turns up at both ends as if to express that you are always looking upward and onward, as if nothing in life would ever undermine your happy outlook upon life."

"Yes, yes."

"And you know that I love the breathless, fluttering way you have of answering me, don't you, Betty?"

"Yes."

"And I love your name—Betty, Betty Garside—you know that, too? Don't you?"

Betty bubbled over with merriment. She felt she must set a period to the compliments, veiled as questions, which he was hurling at her.

"If you love my name, why do you want me to change it?" she teased.

"Because I want you to love my name as much as I

love yours, and because, if you do, you will be quite willing to change from yours to mine," he retorted. "By January first, perhaps before, I will find means of adding to my income, and then——"

"Then you will add generously each week to your Europe Fund," Betty said quickly, "so that, in time, you may become a great artist."

Richard rose and kneeling upon the bench on which Betty was sitting, faced the sun, which floated high and serene above the opposite crest of mountains. Enormous eddies of dense white cloud steamed up from the valleys, hiding, in their white, opaque embrace, all life and its manifold activity in the village below. The hoot-hoot of an invisible locomotive pierced through the surging mist, recalling to them that they were not wholly alone in the world. The tap-tap of a woodpecker, the flip-flap of ripe acorns upon the soft earth accentuated the silence rather than broke it.

"I do not need Europe now," said Richard. "I will become a great artist without Europe."

"Didn't you think Europe indispensable——?"

"I thought so formerly. That was because Europe meant stimulus, enchantment, a new outlook. Now I have found that at home. Of course," he hesitated, "if I *could* afford Europe, it would help me wonderfully. If nothing else, the prestige of having studied abroad means so much."

"And the masters?"

"Yes, yes—the teachers abroad, they say, are finer than ours."

He stood in silence a minute, amazed at a current of mental virility that was sweeping through him. Never before had he experienced such a sensation. He had been skeptical of the delightful feeling ascribed to being in love as described in operas and novels. But this feel-

ing transcended anything he had ever heard or read about. He told himself that, with this feeling locked in his heart and his mind there was nothing, absolutely nothing that he could not accomplish as an artist. And he felt a boundless gratitude to the pale, virginal, black-haired girl who had created these feelings in him.

"Betty," he stood before her flicking some pine needles from the bench with his whip. "There is something I have forgotten to say. Are you going to board when in town? Or live with friends? Telfer's shop is open two evenings a week until eleven, and in lieu of extra pay we receive two free afternoons a week in return for our evening work. You're not living in Harlem or the Bronx, are you?"

"Mother and I lived in Harlem," Betty replied. "I would have to find a new boarding place, at any rate. I don't suppose I could find rooms downtown, could I?"

"I am sure you could." He hesitated. "Will you allow me to find you a room? I want to make sure what sort of a house you get into, and I would like you to be not too far from my boarding place, so that I can call for you and see you home Wednesdays and Saturdays, the evenings you work until eleven."

"Don't you work the same nights?"

"No. Those are my afternoons off. I work Tuesdays and Fridays. But I shall try to arrange matters so that we are both off together at least one afternoon, preferably Saturday."

"Hasn't your landlady a room for me?" Betty queried innocently.

"Mrs. Presbey has a room." Richard fell silent. "I did not suggest your coming to Mrs. Presbey's, because I didn't know how you would feel about coming to the same house, you know."

"That's true," Betty faltered.

"Supposing," Richard continued, "I ask her whether she thinks it all right? We can safely take her word."

Betty clasped her hands with a gesture of supplication. She sat looking at him without replying.

"She is a very charming old lady,—really, a gentlewoman, and she would not let you come unless she thought it just right."

"I'll do whatever you say in the matter," Betty said quietly.

"Thank you for trusting me."

He pulled the watch from his pocket, and whistled.

"It's eight o'clock," he said, "and I've got to make the 9.05 from Penascapet Valley,—gives me barely time to ride back and change to my street clothes. Walk down to the grove of pines, will you?"

Betty rose with alacrity, and they walked the twenty yards involved in silence, her arm resting lightly on his. In a dimple of the road, known as a thank-ye-mum, they stopped.

"Good-bye, darling," he said; "we will arrange all particulars by letter."

He did not kiss her again. To kiss her lightly, quickly, without due reverence, he felt would be to profane her. He shook hands with her and swung himself lightly into the saddle. A moment later the winding road eclipsed him.

Betty turned. In the middle of the road, gravely watching her, sat the chipmunk.

"Eavesdropping again?" she cried, and the little creature scurried away, disappearing among ground creepers, stunted rhododendron and laurel, huckleberry plants, wintergreen berries, sassafras, morning glories and a few yellow alfalfa blossoms that had straggled up from a farm below.

Betty, reclimbing the distance to the house, thought

of her mother. It was curious that she should be able to feel so happy so soon after her great grief. All her self-reproaches had been swept away by Richard's words. It seemed to her that her mother was very close to her, and was rejoicing at her good fortune in having found such a friend.

And while she smiled, she wept.

## CHAPTER V

If Richard Pryce had been a gay Lothario, a heartless and unscrupulous Lovelace, a past master in the arts of seduction and an expert as to the material means of accomplishment, he could hardly have devised a plan more filled with craftiness for the undoing of a maid than the innocent scheme he had evolved of bringing Betty to his own boarding house so that he might institute himself her protector.

Mrs. Presbey, his landlady, was the widow of a physician. Herself a woman of refinement and education, she had contrived to remain every inch a lady in spite of the fact that she rented out rooms. She occupied a small house in Irving Place, nearer Gramercy Square than Fourteenth Street. It was a very small house indeed, and admitted of the renting of three rooms only. Every spring Mrs. Presbey threatened to move uptown and "take a larger house," and every spring the threat had remained an idle menace. Richard occupied the large room to the rear, one flight up, where, if he had a mind to, he could practice all evening without disturbing anyone. The room above his was occupied by an obese gentleman of uncertain age, inalterable deafness and asthmatic inclinations, who lived on his income and spent most of his time at his club. The front room on the top floor was occupied by Mrs. Presbey herself. The remaining room, the room on the first sleeping floor, was the room which was vacant, and which Richard hoped the old lady might be willing to let him have for Betty.

When he suggested this, Mrs. Presbey looked at him with horror in her eyes, and so potent is the moral indignation of age that Richard felt quite as much embarrassed upon encountering the old lady's eyes as if he had actually projected the profligacy which she seemed to impute to him.

"Impossible, Richard," she cried, for she had taken to calling him by his first name.

"Why not?" Richard feigned lamblike innocence.

"I'm surprised at you, Richard. You cannot bring a young girl of your acquaintance to live in the same house with yourself."

"Well, if a young girl I didn't know were to come here, I would become acquainted with her. Would you put her out for that reason?"

No answer.

"Come, Mrs. Presbey, be honest with me."

"The cases are utterly dissimilar. Miss What's-her-name,—Garfield, Gartwright, cannot come here to live while you are in the house."

"Very well, then I will move."

"What——?"

"Just so."

"Do you mean, Richard, that you will move to a house where they will permit you to bring her with you?"

"Mrs. Presbey!"

The old lady bridled; she was very indignant.

"I mean, Mrs. Presbey, that I will move elsewhere, so she can come here. I wouldn't be satisfied to have her anywhere but under your roof."

Richard waited until that crafty compliment had sunk into the landlady's heart, and then continued suavely:

"Mother Presbey, I'm going to tell you a secret."

"Um."

"We're engaged, or as good as engaged."

"What does that mean? As *good* as *engaged?*"

"Well, I haven't really proposed. I—the fact is—I just took it for granted that she would marry me, and as she didn't demur I suppose I may truthfully say we are engaged."

"Well, of all things——"

"Come now, be nice about it. Let me bring her here, and stay here myself as well."

"If you really are engaged, and I do not quite comprehend the situation, I admit, it makes the matter worse than ever. Miss Garfield——"

"Garside, if you please."

"Cannot come here. In my day engaged couples were allowed to see each other only twice a week."

"A silly rule."

"A wise rule. Young folks are young folks, and young folks who are engaged are doubly young folks, and the devil has kept his hand well in practice at the game of temptation, if we may believe the newspapers."

"Mrs. Presbey!" It was a very red and angry Richard that glared down upon the little white-haired woman. "Miss Garside is the sweetest and best and purest girl that ever lived, and——"

"I have not said a word against Miss Garside," Mrs. Presbey interrupted Richard with asperity. "I was never one to blame the woman. I *always* blame the man."

The anticlimax made Richard laugh. He said:

"I never thought that you would *doubt* me."

"I don't doubt you, but, my boy, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

Richard hid his laughter. He cajoled:

"Think, Mother Presbey, when I'm gone, who will see that I have the proper blend of tea and very thin

toast when I get home at eleven o'clock at night too tired to eat anything else? Who, when I get a gastric attack, will boil me barley water? Who will prepare my eggs by pouring boiling water on them, instead of boiling them, because boiled eggs make me bilious? Who, I say, will do all that for me if you force me to move away?"

Mrs. Presbey was in tears at this picture of Richard's desolation.

"I force you to move away?" she cried. "Heaven forbid. I cannot see your digestion ruined. I cannot risk that. I will take the other risk instead. Bring your Miss Garfield, Gartwright, Garson, or whatever her name is, if you wish."

There ensued a week of room-renovating such as Mrs. Presbey had never lived through before. Frequently Richard had had occasion to see the interior of the room which Betty was to occupy. The last lodger had been an old Frenchwoman for whom Richard had sometimes played her favorite selections with the hall doors open to permit the passage of sound. She had been a hideous old woman and had died of gangrene a week after being taken to a hospital. Richard had formerly thought the room comfortable. Now he discovered that the color scheme was atrocious, if one could dignify a threadbare Brussels carpet, on which only the garish red roses retained their original coloring, and a peacock blue wall-paper by so authoritative a term as color scheme. The black walnut furniture, built in the amorphous mid-Victorian style, with marble slab tops on bureau and table, and black horsehair on the seats of chair and sofa, were unspeakable, and when Mrs. Presbey pointed with pride to the modern brass bedstead, Richard became violently denunciatory.

The truth of the matter was that Richard had seen

Madame Zournier in bed on one occasion, when cosmetics, false hair and artificial teeth had been wanting to relieve her general repulsiveness. It was insufferable to think that the same bed that had held the grotesquely horrible Frenchwoman should feel the precious weight of Betty's white, chaste, virginal body. The thought was so vivid that it assumed the form of a picture. He seemed to see the form of the girl he loved—the slim, firm young limbs with their long gracious lines stretched at full length upon a white, curtained bed in a dim, cool room. He saw her head reposing upon the pillow, her hands clasped above the black curls, showing the exquisite white arms, bare to the elbow. The very atmosphere was filled with her essence. He seemed to perceive even the delicious perfume of her wholesome, soft young body—the perfume of her hair, of her skin, the pressure of her hands, the touch of her lips.

A sensation, almost of pain, such as he had never experienced before, stabbed him. His heart beat violently. His pulses leapt. He tried to expel the vision, and to do so effectually he continued to berate the style of the bed, mechanically using the same phrases of condemnation again and again. Amid much pother and fuss he alighted upon a picture of Holofernes being murdered by Judith. This was execrable, an impossible adjunct to a delicate-minded young girl's room.

He called to his assistance the Norwegian maid of all work, an Amazon in stature, with the hair and complexion of a Lorelei, and before Mrs. Presbey could help herself, he had taken the furniture apart, and was moving it into the storeroom.

Mrs. Presbey expostulated that it would be impossible to buy an entirely new set of furniture. Richard retorted that it was not impossible by any means since good furniture was to be had in dozens of stores. As

to the cost, he of course intended defraying all expenses, but it was out of the question for his Betty not to have the best of everything. He chafed because it was Sunday and no shops were open to admit of immediate purchases. He turned the entire house, cellar, storeroom and living-room upside down because he remembered there had been a catalogue of Grand Rapids furniture makers in the house. When, finally, after an hour's search conducted in a hurricane of excitement, the Norwegian maid discovered the catalogue under the ash barrel in the yard, Richard decided peremptorily that they were of no use at any rate, as even telegraphic orders would hardly bring the furniture to New York before the end of two weeks—too late to have the room ready for Betty's arrival. Then, Sunday or no Sunday, he insisted on taking up the vitiated Brussels carpet, because he must needs convince himself that the flooring was in good condition.

"Why not have parquetry floors?" Mrs. Presbey asked with fine scorn. Richard replied seriously that that would be the very thing, but abandoned the plan because time was pressing.

Nothing less than an Axminster rug would do for Betty; furniture, chairs, chiffonier and Davenport of Circassian walnut; last of all he rented a baby grand, and raved and stormed and ranted about the house like a madman for an entire evening because the piano-maker sent a rosewood case instead of Circassian walnut. He himself stained the floors after caulking them, to Mrs. Presbey's consternation; for Richard was her divinity, and it seemed little short of sacrilege to the dear old lady to see her idol kneeling on the floor, ordinary workman's tools in his magic fingers and callousing with unspeakable little tacks and a paint brush the hands that were capable of producing such ravishing music.

The bills for rug, papering, furniture and pictures aggregated eight hundred dollars. This diminished the Europe Fund to a bare three hundred. Mrs. Presbey, who shared his financial secrets, being sworn to secrecy as to the fact that he had defrayed all expenses for Betty's room, shook her head, as old ladies have a provoking way of doing, to show their disapprobation of their junior's antics. Richard thereupon caught her about the waist and waltzed through the room with her, kissing her thrice on each withered cheek, and when he deposited her, breathless and half-angry, upon one of Betty's new chairs, he brushed away her pretended anger by telling her that he knew she had been just as sweet as his Betty when she had been a girl, and he only hoped that his Betty would grow into so charming an old lady as herself. Neither of which statements were sincere, for the young rascal was convinced that nowheres in the world, not in the present, past or future, there had been, or was, or would be such a paragon, such a nonpareil, as his Betty.

All was propitious, then, and after Betty's arrival there followed Arcadian days. They seemed to draw a magic circle about each other those first weeks, which no hostile personality had the power to invade. If they had been alone in the universe, they could not have been more isolated than they were now in the heart of the great city. Perhaps lovers are never quite normal. These two saw everything through a transcendent golden haze, of which they themselves were the nucleus. Persons, environment, the commonplaces of life were their stage-setting, barely the supporting cast, of the drama which they were enacting for their own delectation. It was an unexampled adventure.

They went to a theatre once a week, and once a week to a concert. Twice or thrice they went in the full

panoply of pomp, on two-dollar seats, going and coming in a taxicab, with a dinner at Martin's and a supper at Sherry's and one or two lavender orchids for Betty to wear. But Betty demurred against this extravagance, and she exercised great ingenuity in inventing pretty excuses for preferring gallery seats at seventy-five cents to orchestra chairs, and a forty-cent *table d'hote* dinner to a sumptuous repast at Sherry's or Rector's. There was more atmosphere in the gallery, she said, because all the impecunious art and music students sat there, while stalls and orchestra chairs were occupied by persons who were present not for love of music or the drama, but for the purpose of displaying their clothes, or their shoulders, or their diamonds. Betty had no desire to play the parvenu. Such material splendor absolutely diverted the attention from the higher enjoyment of art. And a forty-cent dinner was to be preferred to a feast because, since it did not taste as good, one was not tempted to eat so much, thus leaving an edge on the spiritual appetite, which was not the case when the grosser appetites had been sated to the point of repletion. Dicky took these little sermons in good part. He knew enough of women both from observation and hearsay to know that during the average courtship the woman is likely to be an elegant sort of vampire or shark, whose sole endeavor is to get what she can in the way of amusement and sweetmeats and drives. How different was his Betty! He told himself a dozen times a day that he was the luckiest of men and that his Betty was an angel.

Then there was the joy of hearing each other play and sing. Richard's playing left Betty breathless with pleased astonishment, and her voice, when one evening she began to hum "Auld Lang Syne," sent him into transports of enthusiasm. He began to teach Betty to

sing that very evening, for she had never had a singing lesson in her life, and he was amazed and enchanted with the strength and volume of her voice as it began to develop.

"Betty," he said one evening, at the end of a half-hour's vocal practice, "I think your voice is quite remarkable. With proper training, I believe you will make a much greater singer than I a pianist."

"If you say that again, Dicky, I shall sing for you no more," Betty retorted. "One genius in the family is quite enough, thank you." And she repeated the musical phrase, which she had been singing, holding the last note so long that it seemed to promise eternal duration.

Betty's voice was a soft, mellow mezzo-soprano, and Richard believed that under the tuition of an expert teacher, the range of Betty's voice might become so extended as to change it into a soprano. But he did not trust himself to attempt the metamorphosis. Her voice was wonderfully pure and flexible; there was only one quality in her voice that perplexed him. It was cold as ice. There was no warmth in it, and it communicated no warmth to him, although he was so much in love with her by this time that the contemplation of any one of her perfections, or the accidental touch of hand or fingers, when he tried to forestall her in turning the sheet music, raised him to the pitch of delirium. There were days when he did not dare to kiss her or take her in his arms, so cruelly turbulent was his blood for hours afterwards in recollection of the endearment.

Richard was fast approaching the danger-point when kisses and the usual caresses of courtship are no longer an outlet of the emotions. He was holding himself well in hand. He was stifling desire, suffocating passion by sheer force of will. But the dikes that held

back emotion and the tumultuous flood coursing in his veins were weakening perceptibly, and he knew it.

Because they had to do with music, it pleased them to regard themselves as Bohemians of the "Quartier Latin" of Fifth Avenue, New York. To foster their Bohemian propensities they made an expedition to an East Houston Street restaurant, of whose unregeneracy and splendid cooking Dicky had heard a good deal. They were sure that something very terrible happened there every night. Just what the very terrible thing was neither he nor she could imagine. But after all their anticipatory thrills nothing happened but that a few girls who had tossed off a little more wine than was good for them sat on their "gentlemen friends'" knees and kissed them. Then Dicky flushed and Betty blushed, and in a little while they came away vociferously protesting to each other that "it was horrid," but he, at least, was secretly disappointed that nothing more had happened.

Dicky's Bohemianism was not wholly assumed. When he was not rhapsodizing at the piano, he had a habit of stalking about Betty's rooms, his long, slender body moving hither and thither with incredible swiftness. All the while he smoked innumerable cigarettes and discoursed on every topic under the sun. The ashes from his cigarettes he deposited wherever he happened to be standing, on mantel, book-cover, or magazine. One night he chanced upon a small china drinking-cup from which Betty drank hot water mornings and evenings, and promptly he deposited his ashes therein. After that Betty drank her hot water from a glass, for the ashes of her Dicky's cigarettes were sacred to her. She treasured the ashes for several days; then, one evening when she was very sleepy because she had been out the night before, she forgot, and poured her hot water into

the cup and drank it off by mistake. She wept for half an hour to think the relic had such an unromantic end, and then she began to worry about the effect of diluted cigar ashes upon her system. She was undecided whether to take an emetic or castor oil. But she had neither in her room, and finally she went to bed, convinced that she was going to die in agony through the night. And she sobbed bitterly on picturing to herself Dicky's woe on finding her gone. But she was very tired, and waiting for one's own death throes when one is eighteen and has done a hard day's work is a tedious task. She fell asleep and awoke the next morning filled with utter amazement to find she was still alive.

So much for Arcady. The days of their sojourn in that uncharted land were numbered. They were fast drawing to a close.

## CHAPTER VI

Arcady came to an end on November 3rd, having lasted just three months and three days. It happened in this way.

The day was a Sunday, and they had gone for a long tramp through the Staten Island woods. They ate a dinner of boiled dandelion and corned beef at a farmhouse and declared it a banquet fit for a king. Then they sallied forth again and tramped until dusk. The day had been one of those perfect Indian summer days when the general decay of nature seems not only to halt on the down stretch, but to be reversed. Twilight came in a blaze of turquoise and rose. They sat down upon the gnarled and rheumatic-looking roots of an old oak standing upon a knoll of ground near the road. The eager, nipping air had whipped every drop of blood in their bodies into a sense of being cryingly alive, and to be cryingly alive meant one thing only for Richard these days.

He had taken small joy in the excursion, and had been silent and taciturn all day. His feelings for Betty had reached their culmination. Formerly tempestuous passion had swept through him only when away from her, and his desire had been vague, undefined, general. Lately he suffered most when with her, and his need of her was now distressingly well-defined. Palavering with himself was no longer possible. He desired her ardently every moment of the day and night. His love for her now transcended every other emotion. His need

for her was monumental. He suffered incessantly. Desire to possess her obsessed him. Intimate thoughts of her assailed him like the breath from a fiery furnace. Try as he would, and he tried with every atom of the manhood that was in him to quell the strange insurrection of his blood, he did not succeed. It almost seemed to him that the more he strove to control himself the more he suffered.

Betty, entirely ignorant of his tormented state, began teasing him.

"Poor Dicky, are you so tired? Lean up against my knee and rest." She put both her arms about his neck, kissed him gently and drew his head back against her knee. He repulsed her, shook himself free almost roughly, and, pulsing with passion, but still self-controlled, sat as straight as a ramrod.

"Gloomy Gus," she mocked. "No, that won't do at all. Let me see, what alliterates with Dicky—Detrimental Dicky, Ducky Dicky, Darling Dicky." Here she tickled the back of his neck with a straw.

"Stop it," growled Richard savagely. Some current seemed to be communicated to him from her fingers with the straw as a connective. Every nerve in his body tingled.

"I've got it," she laughed, throwing her head back as if to more easily emit the flood of jubilant mischief that came bubbling from her lips. "Doleful Dicky."

"If you don't stop, I'll alliterate you."

"Try—I don't believe you can."

To escape the straw, with which she was still worrying him, he changed his position, and sat down beside her.

"Do you mean that I haven't the ability?" he asked, "or that there are no words in the dictionary to suit your case?"

"No words to suit my case! The idea! Detestable Dicky,—oh, no, I don't mean that," and to cover the slip she put her arms around him and laid a lingering kiss upon his cheek.

"Does that soothe the feelings of my dilly-dallying darling, ducky, doleful Dicky?"

Her kiss added to his misery. But he tried valiantly to continue the game.

"I see there's nothing to be done, Betty, but to alliterate you."

"Instead of threatening to do it, do it, *if* you can."

"Bitter-sweet Betty."

"A silly word. Besides, I am all sweet, am I not, Dicky? There is nothing bitter about me, is there?"

"I'm not so certain."

"Richard!"

"Heavens, now you will begin alliterating Richard to punish Dicky."

"Dicky never misbehaves; it is only Richard who requires chastisement."

"Why? How so?"

Betty thoughtfully ran a dry blade of grass along her teeth.

"Well, Richard is masterful, full of odd notions about not caring about Europe, careless of the Europe Fund, careless of his future as an artist."

"Cut it out."

"Why, Dicky, you look positively dangerous. Ah! Dangerous Dicky."

"Look out, Bossy Betty, or Dicky may become dangerous."

"In what way?" she asked wheedlingly. "Won't he buy me a supper to-night? Won't he take me to the Sunday night concert? Well, Dangerous Dicky, speak up."

"Bossy Betty, I'll be dangerous in a different way. I'll hire an aeroplane to kidnap you, and I'll never set you down on earth again until you promise to marry me out of hand."

"Who wants to be set down on earth again?" She bubbled over with laughter. "I would love to live in the clouds. Dangerous Dicky——" She pulled a box of chocolates out of his coat pocket which he had been carrying for her, and opened it. "Dreamy Dicky—that's more like it—dreamy, downcast, silly little Dicky."

She had selected a chocolate and sat surveying it.

"Dicky!"

The bantering note had died out of her voice. She held a chocolate up between two dainty waxen fingers in which the nails lay like bits of exquisitely-carved pink jade.

"Dicky, this is a chocolate raspberry jelly. Try it! You shan't refuse! You must!"

"Bossy Betty again!" He was still trying to keep himself in hand, to check the passion that was sweeping through him with such force that every nerve in his body sang and hummed like an electric wire during a thunderstorm.

"Come, Dicky—open your mouth and shut your eyes, and I'll give you something to make you——"

Betty did not enunciate the last word of the old nursery rhyme. Something in his eyes, a look she had never seen there before, wiped the words from her lips. She sat stock-still, looking at him in fascinated surprise.

"Betty, Betty!" he cried hoarsely, and clasping his arms about her shoulders, he began kissing her feverishly, with a sort of maddened abandon. He sought to kiss her mouth, which his lips had never yet touched, and of which, lying awake in the small hours of the morning, he had thought often and often as a famish-

ing man thinks of bread, or as a connoisseur of wine thinks of a treasured bottle of Madeira of rare vintage. He had thought to enjoy that first kiss leisurely, delicately, as a man of culture and refined tastes enjoys a splendid painting or fine music; and now he was struggling wildly to obtain the coveted privilege, as men threatened with asphyxiation struggle for air.

"Betty, Betty," he panted, kissing her blindly, crazily, without direction,—kissing her eyes, her cheeks, her neck and shoulders through the lingerie waist under the open coat,—"Betty, Betty!"

At first she had passively submitted to his kisses, but her passivity was not due to acquiescence, merely to surprise. Then, twisting twirling, writhing, trying to escape from his greedy mouth and his eager hands, she managed to free herself from his embrace. She was terrified into silence. She could not believe that this madman, whose kisses bruised her flesh, whose arms seemed like the coils of a serpent, could be her gentle and reverent Dicky. She bounded to her feet; he after her. She stumbled away.

"Don't run away from me, Betty," he called out. "I did not mean to frighten you. Don't run—you'll hurt yourself. Look out."

The warning came too late. The partially unearthed loop of an enormous tree-bole caught her foot, and with a little cry she pitched forward, tried to catch herself, only to fall stumblingly. She uttered a sharp cry of pain. Richard was at her side even before she had extricated the injured member, and helped her rise. She gave another cry of distress.

"I've twisted my ankle, Dicky,—I cannot rise,—I cannot get up! What in all the world are we going to do?"

"I guess you will have to let me get off the shoe

before the ankle begins to swell, and tie my handkerchief around it as firmly as possible," he suggested.

"I couldn't think of it."

He entreated; she refused. The sun had gone down, the afterglow was thin and meager. Darkness crept up about them, making the landscape,—brown barren fields, tree boles and fantastic branches—look weird and unnatural, like one of Rackham's drawings. Shadows stole forth from earth and upturned roots like hobgoblins; odd shapes crept toward them from the road and mocked them; and the clouds turned to purple canopies that threatened to fall upon them.

Finally she consented to allow him to carry her down from the knoll to the road.

"I'll run back to the farmhouse we passed, Betty, and get them to hitch up a wagon."

"Oh, Dicky, don't leave me,—I'm frightened to death."

"But, Betty, darling, we cannot stay here all night."

"The village isn't more than a mile away. I remember this part of the road perfectly. I can walk it."

"Dearest—you cannot."

"I can."

She walked a few steps, only to collapse again, this time without having uttered a sound. But her cheek was wet with tears.

"And it's all my fault," he said, filled with self-loathing and abasement.

"Mine, Dicky, for running away from your kisses." She strove to speak merrily, as if sitting in the middle of an unlighted country road,—miles away from anywhere, with a sprained ankle as the result of a nervous shock,—were part of the ordinary program of her life.

"Dicky, I have an idea. Before it gets darker, try to find me a strong limb of a tree with a fork formed

by two diverging branches, and I will use it as a crutch."

He complimented her upon her ingenuity, and ran off, returning in a few moments with a miscellaneous assortment of branches. He had come upon a lot of dead timber heaped up against a stone hedge, and had discovered half a dozen of possible crutches. They selected the most suitable branch. Dicky tied his own and Betty's handkerchiefs around the forked end as a pillow. Then they began their journey.

It was laborious and painful traveling. Betty bore her agony like a soldier, but when they finally reached Stapleton, having walked a mile and taken three and a half hours to do it in, Betty fainted dead away. At the drug store to which Dick and a passerby carried her, it was found that the ankle was so swollen that it was necessary to cut the shoe in order to get it off. The druggist's wife got her some warm milk to drink, while the druggist, an old man in a dark blue velvet smoking jacket, who looked as if he had stepped out of Thackeray's pages, applied compresses of arnica and witch-hazel.

"How soon can you get her home?" he asked.

"About an hour and a half," said Dicky. "I suppose there is a garage here somewhere, so I can get an auto or a taxi."

"I'll telephone for you," said the druggist, "and I'll give you a bottle of this stuff to take with you. It's a cold night," he shivered a little, "so I will get you a closed vehicle, and I will make a fresh application just before she leaves. Then, as soon as you get her home, you want to apply either ice or hot-water compresses. One is as good as the other, but whichever you apply, you'll have to continue with through the night at intervals of twenty minutes. If you do this, the foot will be

all right by to-morrow evening. Otherwise the young lady will have a bad time of it, a bad time!" He shook his head dolefully.

The instructions seemed easy enough. Mrs. Presbey would probably arrange to take turns with Nora, the Swedish Lorelei-haired Amazon, in tending Betty. Richard felt that the matter was adjusting itself more easily than he had dared hope.

But on reaching home, Richard found a note from Mrs. Presbey pinned to the old-fashioned hatstand, saying that owing to the sudden illness of her only sister's child, she was forced to remain away for the night. She had instructed Nora to wait up until nine in case he or Miss Garside wanted something to eat. If Nora was asleep when he got in, he was to go to the icebox and help himself. Then followed minute instructions as to the location of the cold chicken, the egg salad in cups, the coffee jelly with whipped cream and the iced tea in a milk bottle.

The sheet of note paper fluttered to the floor back of him as he sprang up the stairs, three steps at a time, in his journey to the top floor.

"Nora," he cried, "Nora!" and began pounding upon the Amazon's door. But the Amazon was emitting Brobdinagian snores which proclaimed her safe from intrusion, and Dick called and knocked in vain. The snores continued their placid tenor at even intervals.

Sick at heart and a little frightened, Dick went heavily downstairs, and told Betty what they "were up against."

"Well," said Betty calmly, "there's nothing to be done. You'll have to help me to my room, and I'll make a fresh application of the arnica he gave us every time I wake. To-morrow Mrs. Presbey will help me out with the hot-water compresses."

Dick said nothing. He was diplomatic enough to help Betty upstairs first, and then began to argue.

"You know what the old chap said, Betty," he reminded her. "You don't want to be laid up for weeks, and risk having an inflammation of some sort, do you?"

"I guess I will have to."

"No, you won't. You are going to let me take care of you this night."

"Impossible."

"No, dear, it's not impossible. You are going to undress and get to bed, and after you are in bed, I'm coming back to your room to apply the hot-water compresses."

"No, Dicky, you are *not*."

"Betty, why not?"

"It would be flying in the face of convention and decency."

"Convention, yes,—decency, no."

"Dicky, don't tease me."

"Betty, don't you trust me?"

He tried to catch her eye, but she averted her head and began blowing into the fingers of her gloves as she had a habit of doing to keep them from wrinkling.

"Betty, are you afraid of me?"

No answer.

"Betty, answer me."

Still she did not reply.

"Betty, do you trust the man you have promised to marry so little? You trust me enough to place your entire life in my keeping, but you do not trust me enough to allow me to remain in your room for one night to play nurse?"

Still she maintained her singular silence, and stung by her mute opposition more than by openly avowed distrust, he continued excitedly:

"Is it because of what occurred this afternoon?"

She looked up at last, and in the blind look of fright in her eyes he read his answer. Without a word he rose, and walked to the door.

"Dicky, where are you going?"

"To ring up the New York Hospital and see if they can send us a nurse for the night."

"But it's after eleven, isn't it?"

"Yes. I doubt whether we can get someone from there to-night. If not, I am going out to a nurse's home in Fourteenth Street, where I went last year for Mrs. Presbey. I cannot telephone, because I don't know the exact address. But I can locate it easily by going there."

"Dicky, you are not going to leave me alone in the house?"

"Apparently you'll feel safer alone than with me near you."

"Dick, don't go,—please don't go. I'm afraid to be left alone," she entreated.

He had spoken without looking at her. Now he turned and faced her. He was very white, and his anger and resentment now overflowed in such a cataract of words that coherency of speech, even clarity of enunciation were precluded.

"What an unutterable brute you must think me! What under the sun do you think me capable of? What have I done that you should think so ill of me? Because I kissed you with a little more ardor than usual this afternoon, you jump at the conclusion that I'm not to be trusted,—that I'm some sort of an unmentionable cur—a cur, yes, that's what you evidently think me."

"Dicky, oh, Dicky, please don't go on like that."

"As if any halfways decent-minded man would think of anything but alleviating the suffering of the woman he loved when she is in pain."

"Dicky, please——"

"You cannot imagine I would have the poor taste to make love to you while I am in your room caring for your ankle. And even if there was nothing the matter with your ankle, if you were not ill, don't you suppose you would be safe with me anywhere, at any time, until—I mean always——"

He broke off, and she said conciliatorily, in her softest, most ingratiating way:

"Yes, Dicky, of course, of course. It's very sweet of you to offer to sit up with me, and if you are sure you don't mind, I'll be glad to have you."

He came and took both her hands in his, and looked searchingly into her eyes. A look of utter wretchedness had succeeded the blind look of fright.

"Please don't scold me any more," she said in a piteous voice, "and don't leave me just now. I feel—I really feel ill."

She began to cry softly, and he sat down beside her.

"I'm cold," she sobbed, "I am so dreadfully cold." She began to tremble violently with a nervous chill. He brought her jacket to her, but she shook her head.

"Please get me my eiderdown flannel, instead."

He went to the closet in which she kept her clothes, which was as large as a small room, and walked into it. Her gowns and waists, neatly turned inside out, fragrant with the perfume of her own sweet, virginal body, faced him in unimagined, immaculate intimacy. A sense of bewilderment passed over him, that was immediately swept away by a sense of ownership, of possession. His imagination played him the trick of presenting to him the episode in perspective, as if he had stood in that sanctuary dozens of times before.

"It's quite near the door," said Betty's voice from between chattering teeth.

He found it, thrilling at touch of the garment, carried it across the room, and wrapped it about her. But even the warm wrapper lacked potency to check those convulsive chills.

"Dicky," she whispered, "put your arms around me."

Obediently he encircled her with his strong arms, and in a few moments the warmth of his body against which she lay limp and flaccid like a broken flower, quieted her.

"Dicky," she whispered, "I don't deserve your being so sweet to me," and of her own accord she offered him her lips, the lips which he had longed to kiss so often and so passionately, and which, until that moment, she had invariably refused him. Remembering the terror with which he had inspired her that afternoon by his unwonted warmth, he kissed her mouth very delicately, very lightly, feeling, too, that more prolonged kisses would be unfair to himself, would make the night's adventure harder for himself than was necessary.

Mercilessly he thrust into the background the emotions which were arising in him.

"And now, Bossy Betty," he said, "you are going to be bossed. You are to be in bed in fifteen minutes. Then I am coming back with the gas cooker which I will abstract from the kitchen, and the little copper teakettle of which I will deplete the parlor. Then prepare to be parboiled and tortured with water heated beyond boiling point, as if you were a victim of the Inquisition."

"Dicky—I couldn't. I will just lie down on the Davenport, without undressing, you know?"

"Dearest, I thought we had settled that? You are worn out. You must get to bed. I am afraid you will be ill unless you get a sound night's rest."

"Very well, Dicky." She spoke like a small child that has been out-reasoned and out-argued.

"Good-night, my dear girl. When I get back here, remember, I will not be your dear Dicky. You are to address me as 'Nurse.' I will be highly professional, and expect to be treated with the respect and submission due my authoritative position." He bustled about in imitation of the manner espoused by trained nurses.

In spite of Richard's heroic efforts to place the entire episode on a humorous footing, it was a very white and frightened looking Betty that sat up in bed as he came back into the room. The sight of the sweet face of the girl he loved, with her black curls falling about her shoulders like a fountain of liquid ebony, her black eyes looking out of the white face like twin mountain lakes harassed by an impending storm, sent the forked lightning through him. But he was in full control of himself. Whatever suffering the unique and embarrassing situation in which they found themselves might entail upon himself, he was determined that for Betty the night's adventure should present no disagreeable features in retrospection.

Therefore, paying no heed to Betty's very apparent nervousness, he tied a large bath towel about his lean person, as if it were a nurse's apron, and in a falsetto voice extolled the medicinal virtues of hot water, while he busied himself with the gas cooker and the tea-kettle. He was not very successful in creating a semblance of jollity. There are many brands of humor, and the rollicking, minstrel-show, freak brand was not for Dicky to essay. But his intentions were good, and his antics helped fill up awkward pauses.

When at last the crucial moment arrived and Dicky stood before Betty's bed, hot, dripping compress in hand, she extended her foot quite naturally. In spite

of the red, swollen ankle, it was such a white, beautifully sculptured foot, with toes and instep as exquisitely modelled as any new-born infant's, that Dicky forgot the part he was playing, and exclaimed:

"What a perfect little Trilby it is, Betty."

He slapped the hot compress over the ankle. She shivered a little.

"Is it too hot?"

"No, it feels good, now it is on."

"And now, Betty," he had pulled the covers over her foot and stood looking down upon her, "you had better go asleep—I'll watch the kettle boil and the clock wag its tail, and when twenty minutes are up, I'll contrive to apply a new compress without waking you. Good-night."

"Good-night, Dicky."

He crossed the room and sat down beside the drop light, about which he had built a semi-circular barricade to shield Betty's eyes from the light. He had brought the score of an opera with him to study while he kept his vigil, but he found that he had brought with him Tristan and Isolde instead of Lohengrin.

He opened the book at haphazard and chanced upon *the Liebestod.* He was familiar with the opera, and the perusal of the score invoked in him a poignant recollection of the music. As his eye traversed the page, the cold type of the score leaped into life, setting on fire his musician's imagination. He experienced what may be called an aural vision. He seemed to hear the syncopated passionate music, each bar of which was a heart-beat, each phrase a pulsing of the senses. One by one the voices of the orchestra became apparent to him. The mad onslaught of the violins—the circling music of the wood instrument, and above the harmonious roar of the orchestra there rose triumphant the limpid and strong

voice of the woman, and by fantastic trick of fancy, amounting almost to a hallucination, it seemed to him that the woman who was singing the wonderful music thus passionately, the woman whose voice was a musical apotheosis of sex was Betty—white-faced, black-haired Betty, in whose voice there was not the remotest suggestion of sex!

He tried to shake off the singular fantasy. He closed the book and put it away. But the music continued to ring in his ears—continued to disturb him, to rouse him, to titillate through him.

Then a keen sense of the actual situation came to him. The woman he loved lay not two yards away from him; it was midnight; they were alone in the house, or as good as alone. He shuddered and trembled, as with ague. This would never do. As soon as Betty was asleep, he would get the score of Handel's "Messiah" or Verdi's "Requiem Mass" to help him keep his heart clean of unworthy thoughts through this night at least.

"Dicky."

"Betty?"

"Dicky, darling, I am a selfish pig. I never once thought of your hands. They're so sensitive to extremes of temperature. The hot water is sure to hurt them."

"Don't worry about that, little girl. A little cold cream will fix 'em up all right. Just go to sleep."

His temples throbbed, his blood burned in his veins like a fever. He stretched out his hands, and laid them upon the cold marble of the mantelpiece; but the marble grew warm before his hands became cool.

"Dicky, dear!"

"Yes, Betty?"

"Dicky, dear, I've been horrid to you. I want to apologize."

"That's all right, Betty. No cause for an apology, I'm sure."

"You are sure you're not angry with me?"

"Quite sure."

He placed his hands, cool at last, against his burning temples. He could feel the blood humming in his pulses with an indefatigable persistence that was communicating dizziness to his brain.

"Dicky, dear!"

"Yes, Betty?"

"Dicky, dear—if you're not angry with me, why didn't you kiss me 'Good-night'? It never happened before, you know."

"Chance, Betty."

If she had been a seasoned coquette she could not have troubled him more cruelly. Great waves of an intangible something, some wild-running sort of energy seemed to traverse his brain.

"Dicky, dear, won't you kiss me 'Good-night' now? I think I will be able to sleep if I'm sure you're not a wee bit provoked."

The room seemed to gyrate before him. He made a Herculean effort to steady his nerves, rose and walked across the room. The words rose to his lips, "Betty, I dare not kiss you, now"; but now that she had accepted as quite in place the unusual situation and was trusting him so sublimely, the thought of admitting his lack of self-control offended him. He rose to the height of the heroism required of him. He stooped and kissed her.

To cut off further conversation and temptation, he continued:

"Betty, I will play you Schumann's *'Schlummerlied.'* I will play it so softly that it will be your lullaby."

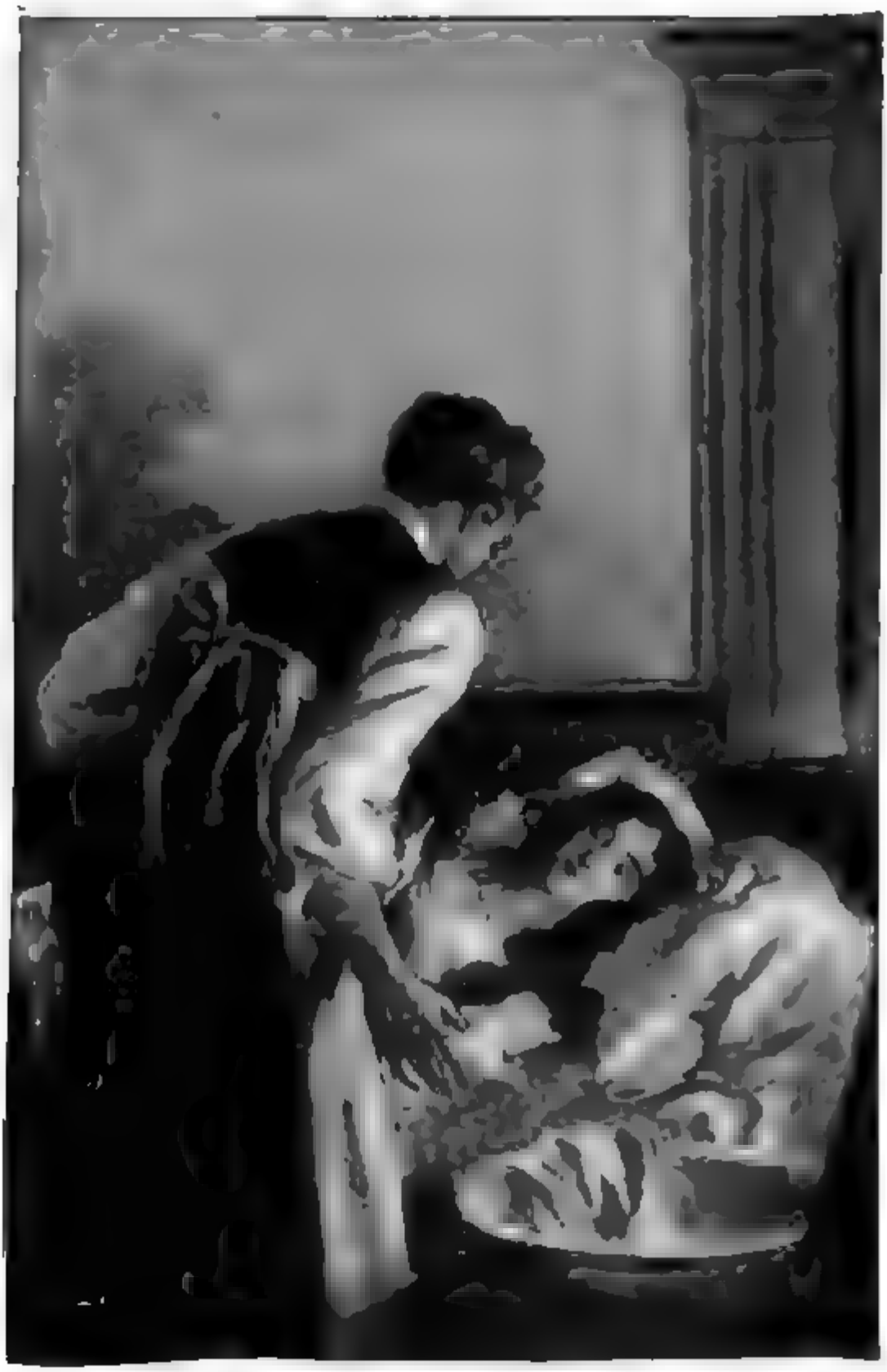
He went to the piano, and began playing. "Velvet Fingers," the epithet bestowed upon Chopin by George

Sand, was the term Betty had applied to Richard, unconscious of the illustrious use made of the designation a century ago until he told her of it. To-night Richard played with velvet fingers, indeed. When he had finished the *lied,* he found, on looking up, that Betty had fallen asleep.

There ensued a half hour of exquisite torture. Richard did not wish to look at Betty asleep, and yet some invisible chain seemed to drag him toward her. Her lips had parted lightly; she was smiling; one white arm lay above her head, half buried in the black billows of her hair; the other arm lay across her breast, accentuating the outlines of the glorious young bosom.

With the last bit of sanity that remained, Richard recrossed the room, and sat down at the open window. His torment increased, towered, became Gargantuan. Phials of hostile poisons seemed to have entered his veins, to be struggling with the ferocity of famished beasts of prey maddened by sight of blood. Sinister and black thoughts assailed him, crowded about him, enveloped him; thoughts so infamous and abysmal that even in that hour of madness, when every manly fiber seemed relaxed and powerless to dam the tide of passion, he shuddered to think that such iniquitous thoughts could inhabit in him, shuddered as he would have shuddered on finding upon his body a leprous spot.

All his life, in a way, he had ignored sex. He had supposed that when love came it would come decorously, placidly, sweetly. He had taken the romantic, the sentimental view of love. He had despised those who regarded it in any other light. He had supposed that he would always be the master of love, that he would welcome it into his life only as a new chord on which to play on a moonlight night. Yes, decidedly, he had considered love in its sentimental aspect only, and having



"ONLY TO KISS HER! ONLY TO KISS HER!" HE WHISPERED TENDERLY. p. 103

pt his imagination clear and his heart pure it seemed me devilishly unmerited, unjust retribution of fate to ng into his veins these myriad flaming cauldrons that rroded and vitiated and burned. He no longer wonered that men, when love usurped the reins, became pable of every infamy, of every excess. He himself lt capable of he knew not what. "Only to kiss her, ly to kiss her," he whispered tensely. He understood w why experienced men and women opposed the ing under one roof of engaged couples. Now, o, he understood Mrs. Presbey's objection to his inging Betty to the house. But why, in heaven's name, d they shift the burden of the objection upon the oulders of convention? Why cloak and disguise and ask the truth? Why not say plainly that propinquity eeds the fever of temptation, the miasma of seductive oughts, as nothing else can do? Was every convenon hedging about the young grounded in some inolable law of nature?

He had longed for Europe, not merely for the sake f a superior instructor, but for the sake of the stimlus which Europe was supposed to supply. Yet what imulus could Europe offer comparable to this? And e, fool of fools, green, silly untried fool that he had een, had thought love a soft, inconsequential thing, a ttle tiny thing to harness down in a wreath of forgetie-nots and roses! Love—the sex-element—he saw it lainly now, was the one great stationary fact in life, e one constant, unchangeable milestone, the motive wer, the fulcrum, the pivot, the hub.

How very plain this unreasoning, blind, driving force, at had been unleashed within him, was making many ings? The flames in his blood had set fire to his nagination. Protean, bizarre visions flashed past his irit eye with lightning rapidity. In his early adoles-

cence, when the mystery of sound had first embraced him with arms of enchantment, the Catholic Church, as it existed in the Middle Ages, with lure of ritual and glamour of mysticism, had thrown its spell upon him. He had spent many a vapory hour on golden summer days in reading of the customs and manners of bygone days. He had conjured visions of monastery gardens, made dim and cool as the monastery itself by the leafy panoply of century-old hemlocks and oaks and beech, where sober-faced monks, lean and gaunt and gray, had taken somber half-hours of recreation at twilight. They had led hard, laborious, lack-luster lives. Their days had been days of toil and fasting, and their rest at night had been broken by voluntary vigils and compulsory prayers. And not satisfied with the truceless gloom shed over their lives by incessant toil and deliberate hardships, they aggravated the somberness of their lives by self-inflicted tortures. They did not consider that the omnipresent flesh was sufficiently mortified by constant denial. They voluntarily superimposed positive pain upon negative discomfort, believing that they thereby pleased God, and to compass divine benediction they flagellated themselves with cruel whips which lacerated and ate into their flesh.

Richard had never been able to comprehend these flagellations. It seemed crude and raw and brutal to him that men of cultured minds, of spotless lives, of active charity should inflict upon themselves monstrous tortures. Now, in a flash of insight, he understood that although the world judges men by their actions, men of probity judge themselves by their hidden thoughts and unexpressed desires. He could now conceive how, filled with shame and humiliation because of vagrant yearnings of the flesh, they had embraced physical torture as a welcome means of cleansing themselves from

the pollution of poisonous thoughts. Or, perhaps, they had lashed themselves from a purely human desire to escape the greater pain, knowing that no external agony could equal the inward torment.

Now also he could understand why the Roman Church exacts celibacy of its priesthood. In demanding that, it demands the supreme sacrifice. Poverty, labor, vigils—what are these as compared to the suppression of the ultimate craving of the flesh, the supreme intoxication, the final, incessant, crying need of humanity?

And yet, in spite of his suffering, Richard felt that for no consideration would he have parted with it or with the new knowledge, the new insight into life which the awakening of the sex element had bestowed upon him. "Ye have eyes and ye see not; ye have ears and ye hear not;" That had been the case with him. That feeling was the "Open Sesame" to the mystery underlying all life. Now the veil that had shrouded life from him was withdrawn. He told himself proudly that now there was nothing he could not fathom or divine. A sixth sense seemed to have been bestowed upon him. He likened himself to a colorblind man, who having sensed all the manifold splendor and majesty of field and coppice and stream as a gray etching, through some necromancy of science receives the gift of color perception, and for the first time apprehends the subtle, poignant joyousness which color bestows upon the landscape.

He was intensely proud of the fire through which he had passed, and of having come off so cleanly. He became calmer. He was able to look at Betty now without relapsing into the condition of an unreasoning brute. He reflected that Betty was wholly untouched by a change such as had occurred in him. It was the same Betty who, thinking no evil, had asked him to kiss her while in bed before falling asleep, and who had kissed

him in the rustic summer-house at Penascapet at sunrise one morning. There had been no growth, no development. This perplexed him. He did not wish her less pure, but more mature. He remembered how she shrank away from him whenever his hands became a trifle bold in their wooing, how she froze whenever his kisses were prolonged beyond the point which she thought seemly.

He felt that in justice to both himself and her, he must make some effort to awaken her, but his horror of offending her had so far made abortive every attempt of his in this direction. His great hope was that after marriage her awakening would come about by itself. Whereas his former hopes had centered in a career, they now centered in the thought of making Betty his wife. His career would have to look out for itself.

The clock struck one. He started from his revery. It was time for a new compress.

## CHAPTER VII

Mrs. Presbey did not return the next day, and Betty was left with Nora the Amazon to attend to her. Nora's heart was kind, but that circumstance did not make her hands less clumsy, and Betty writhed in pain more than once when the boiling compress was slapped roughly upon the sore ankle.

However, Betty's optimism came well to the fore as always. Her suffering was abundantly compensated for by the testing of her Dicky. True, the accident had been due to very singular behavior on his part, to which she was unable to assign any explanation except such a one as she most earnestly did not wish to consider. The subsequent happenings of the night had made it satisfactorily clear to her that her Dicky in no way shared the strange appetites of men. Dicky was a law unto himself. Nature had cast him into the mold of a man, but had refrained from injecting the lower man nature into that mold. Dicky was above certain mundane emotions. Dicky had gloriously vindicated himself.

Dicky came home a little earlier than usual. He barely touched the diced chicken on toast which Nora had prepared in imitation of Mrs. Presbey's very delicious dish of the same name, and when he ran up to Betty's room, he found her tasting the messy-looking stuff very gingerly.

"Don't eat that stuff, Betty," he implored; "Nora must have seasoned it with sawdust and colored it with

wash-blue. I am going to order a dinner to be sent from the St. Denis or Mouquin's."

"Oh, no, don't do that," said Betty. "It would hurt Nora's feelings so horribly, you know."

"Do you think Nora's sensibilities can be hurt?"

"Why not?" Betty retorted sturdily. "She is a human being like you and me."

Dicky laughed.

"Excuse me," he said, "but I object strenuously to your comparing either yourself or me to our kitchen Amazon. Come, let's think up a menu."

"Dicky," said Betty with sweet seriousness, "do you realize what an effort it must have been for Nora to get up this dinner for us all by herself? She isn't a cook, and she tried very hard to prepare a dinner just like Mrs. Presbey's lovely Monday night dinners for us."

"Surely, you don't call that fricasseed dog's meat a dinner, do you?"

"I certainly do, and I intend to eat it. I wouldn't hurt Nora's feelings for worlds."

"And this—Land of Goshen—what have we here? As I live by bread—a bouquet of soup celery and the green ends of carrots and—yes, it's parsley, if I may believe my eyes."

"You shan't laugh at it, Dicky. She meant it so kindly. She said, 'A little green do make the tray look finer, Miss.' You are positively horrid, Dicky. I prize Nora's bouquet of parsley and soup celery as much as the roses you sent me. Yes, I do."

"Oh, Betty!"

"Don't look at me like that, Richard. Not quite as much, my foolish, darling Dicky. How could I? There, don't frown. Of course I'd love a weed you brought me better than diamonds and sapphires tendered by anyone else. Now, are you content?"

"You sentimental little darling——"

"It was sweet of you to send the roses, Dicky. Thank you."

"Well, keep Nora's bouquet, Betty. Shall I press it for you? Between Tennyson's 'Lotus-Eaters' or Shelley's 'Sky-Lark'? Which?"

"Dicky, you have a corrupt mind. I never suspected it before. No, you must not kiss me now. I am going to eat this what-do-you-call-it?"

"*Ragout de chien.*"

"Dicky, how absolutely abominable you can be. I shall eat it. Did you eat yours?"

"No, I didn't feel called upon to embrace martyrdom just yet."

Betty's fork was poised in the air and was about to descend upon the plate, when Dicky, with a quick gesture, drew away the plate. Spreading a newspaper, he prodded the toast with its layer of chicken from the plate upon the paper with a knife, and then folded up the paper.

"Now Nora's feelings won't be hurt," he said. "I'll go for a walk later on and drop it into an ash barrel where some marauding dog will find it and have a Lucullian repast. Sweets to the sweet, and dogs to the dog."

"Dicky, what is the matter with you to-night?"

"I'll tell you in a very little while. First of all. What am I to order? Oyster cocktail?"

"Oyster cocktail? You don't mean to order a course dinner?"

"I sure do. I have programs, beg pardon, bills of fare, from two restaurants in my pocket. Oyster cocktail? Or crab cocktail?"

"Dicky—the Europe Fund. . . ."

"Bother the Europe Fund. Oyster cocktails for two.

How about ochre consommé, or would you prefer onion soup?"

"Onion soup? Horrors!"

"Ochre consommé, then Escargons or chicken liver sauté?"

"Dicky, dear, how can I eat all that when I've sat still on the sofa all day."

"People who sit still all day must eat, nevertheless. Escargons?"

"Not for me."

"Chicken liver sauté, then. And a nice, tender, juicy tenderloin steak will suit us both, with baked artichokes and fried egg plant. What desert? Tortoni or chocolate Charlotte Russe or French cream? Cream I see it in your eyes. There, I'll telephone the order, and then I'll tell you the great news."

Within five minutes he had telephoned and was back in the room. He drew up a chair alongside of the Davenport, on which Betty was lying, and settled himself close beside her as for a long talk.

"Now, Betty," he said tenderly, taking her hand in his, "I have great news for you. Mr. Telfer was asked to recommend a pianist to illustrate the music of various composers at the Weekly Lectures given by the Musical Progress League, and he recommended me. That means fifteen dollars extra a week right into June, and that in turn means, sweetheart, that we can get married."

He had expected her to exclaim joyously and perhaps to demur perfunctorily. But he had expected to have his way in the end. However, although her face had brightened and her black eyes had lightened as they had a way of doing when things went well with him, a look of determined, flinty opposition such as he had never seen in her usually passive face succeeded the other look when he spoke of marriage.

"We mustn't think of getting married just yet."

"Why not?"

"In the first place, Dicky, dear, there is your future to be considered."

"I must decide about that."

"Not if you decide wrong."

"Betty, listen to me. If I had the means to devote myself to music without foregoing you, I would do so. As it is—I must abandon my career. I cannot forego you. I want to get married, Betty."

"How unreasonable you are, Dicky. We're as good as married."

"Not quite."

"We are always together, Dicky, we live in the same house, we eat our meals together, we work in the same business. We could not be together more constantly than we are."

"We are not always together, Betty. Think, dear, how sweet it would be never to part for the night—you asleep in my arms."

She drew back, alarmed by the look in his eyes. It was the same look that had made her run from him on Sunday. The horrible suspicion flashed across her mind that after all there might be more than an external resemblance between her Dicky and other men. Some of the cruelly brutal things her mother had said to her about men came rushing back. "All men are alike. When they marry it is for one thing only." She flushed. She looked dazed, helpless, she thrust the thought away from her. It libelled her Dicky. He had never really given her cause to suspect him of such depravity, and with a little shiver of joy she remembered how tenderly he had attended to her through the night. Passion, desire, other men might make those lower instincts their goal, but her Dicky was actuated by other motives.

Surely, he had meant nothing beyond the actual meaning conveyed by his words.

"We are always together, Dicky," she repeated helplessly. "Why should we marry? I suppose you wouldn't allow me to go on supporting myself, and I would hang about your neck like a millstone."

"Betty, dear, you are inventing obstacles."

She did not reply. She was lying among the sofa pillows, and as she lay there under the uncertain gas light, the sense of her fragile beauty came rushing over him like the waters of an eddy. His suppressed craving for her, the unspeakable torment through which he had passed only the night before shook him to the very marrow. Caution, prudence, reserve, the necessity of observing the utmost delicacy in dealing with her went down in that whirlpool of desire like so many straws.

"Betty, Betty," he begged. "Betty, Betty, let me kiss your lips; let me kiss you, only once, as I want to kiss you!"

His arms, clasped her waist. She unclasped them forcibly. His mouth approached hers.

"No, no," she cried in terror. "No, Richard, no."

"You offered me your mouth to kiss last night," he said, his voice hoarse with passion.

"You were different then."

"I am always the same."

"No, no, you were different."

"I cloaked my feelings. I was the same. My feelings for you never vary. Let me kiss your mouth."

"No, no, I don't know why I allowed you to do so last night. I never allow anyone to kiss my mouth—even my mother never kissed it."

"I am your future husband. A husband has privileges. . . ."

"Richard!"

Her face was gray with horror, her eyes large and lustrous with fear. Having broken the ice, Richard plunged on in headlong, reckless haste.

"Betty—I am mad for you—quite mad. You have promised to be my wife. I am able to offer you a comfortable home now, and you shall not keep me waiting any longer."

All the purple and golden mists which had swathed her love were rudely torn away. The fragrance, the dewiness, the ethereal loveliness of her love lay flawed and shattered.

"Richard—how can you say a thing of that sort to me," she gasped.

"I would have preferred your understanding without my being so plain. But you forced me to be blunt."

"I refuse to continue the conversation."

"Betty, we are to be man and wife."

"The more reason why you should respect me."

"Respect you! Good Heavens!" Richard strode up and down, running his fingers nervously through his hair. He had considered himself the luckiest of men in the promise of Betty's hand, but here was a point in which his Betty was not calculated to make him happy. Here was the rift in the lute. "Respect you!" he repeated. "You don't suppose respecting you consists in treating you as if you were a disembodied spirit, do you?"

"I refuse to listen."

It occurred to him that she might be ignorant as well as innocent.

"Betty," he demanded brusquely, "do you know the meaning of love? I really wonder if you do."

"What you are trying to tell me about is not love. It's—oh, I cannot even say the poisonous word."

"Betty, dear," he said very patiently, sitting down

beside her again, "you must understand that in true love there is a feeling very different from mere affection. There can be no love without passion, but there can be passion without love. What I feel for you is true love, since my affection was wholly yours before you awakened in me——"

"Don't say the horrible word again," she begged. "It's odious."

"——the deeper, more intense feeling," he said very quietly.

"If you knew how this revolts me."

"Then, Betty, I am afraid you do not love me."

"I do, I do. I haven't a thought that is not for you. I live only for you, Dicky. How can you say I do not love you?"

"I know you believe you do, darling. But do you? The feeling you have for me differs quantitatively only from what you have felt for others,—your mother, girl-friends. But love for the man you are going to marry should differ qualitatively as well. You must realize this, Betty."

"You cannot imagine, Dicky, that—I—no, really, I cannot continue this conversation."

"Sweetheart, if you cannot bear to discuss the most vital matter in life with me—how could you bear to think of marrying me?"

The look of fright in her eyes deepened to panic. She said nothing. He continued.

"If you have not this strange, wonderful, intense feeling that craves the most intimate relationship possible between human beings—between lovers—you do not love me."

"Oh, Richard, I—I do not believe any woman can be so low, so vulgar, as to feel like that."

"Low? Vulgar?" He stared at her. Then he rose

and resumed walking the floor. "Good Heavens," he said, "is that the way it seems to you?" There fell a brief pause. "Betty," he said, speaking with such a degree of tenderness as, tender though he habitually was with her, she had never known him to employ, "the only feeling that renders the marriage relation pure and ennobles it is passion, passion allied to the affection which needs no explaining. To approach marriage in any other way makes it unchaste and unhallowed. Nature has meant this to be so, or she would not have implanted the strong, primordial sex-instinct in men and women."

She had not met his eyes once while he was speaking, and he could see that his words had filled her with resentment and hostility.

"Won't you try at least, Betty, to understand my viewpoint?" he pleaded.

"Certainly not. I would despise myself if I could look at the matter in any other light. Certain things are so unspeakable that self-respecting women do not attempt to understand them."

"Betty—you are a child, an unawakened child; your more mature faculties are still dormant. If I were to try to marry you now, I would be a monster. I would be violating your innocence."

He paused. A horrible fear swept over him.

"It is possible," he said, speaking with profound emotion, "that what I suggested before is quite true. You may not love me. If you loved me, it seems to me that I would have the power to stimulate in you the feelings which you have stimulated in me. I will not again urge you to let our marriage take place until I am sure of this point—until I know that I have awakened a corresponding feeling in you."

"Then we will never be married," she said composedly.

Her quiet, deliberate, unshakable obstinacy angered him unreasonably.

"Now that I know how you feel about marriage," he said with the iciness of passion arrested and reversed, "I can only marvel at the singularity of the mental processes that led you to make the rash promise of marrying me. Frankly, why did you engage yourself to me?"

"Do you mean," she faltered, "that now that you know how I feel about things—what I think—you wish to break our engagement?"

Inexperienced as Richard was with women, intuition told him that no mature woman would have asked that question. Her pride would have impelled her to seek more devious means of ascertaining the man's wishes. Realizing the significance of the candid question, Richard felt his anger melt away.

"No, little Betty," he said gently, "I do not wish to break our engagement. I love you so well that I will wait, wait indefinitely in the hope that you will awaken some day to your woman's heritage. But tell me, Betty —I am really curious to know—how did you have the courage to engage yourself to me—to anyone?"

Betty did not reply. Her face was a chalky white as she sat with lowered eyes, her hands crossed above her bosom, as if to restrain the beating of her heart. The characteristic gesture told of her inward turmoil. Suddenly he comprehended.

"Betty, darling, did you think that yourself and I were alike in that we differed from all other men and women?"

In response, she nodded her head, without speaking. To facilitate resting her head against the pillows, she had not pinned up her hair, and the black curls bobbed up and down and around the snowy neck as she nodded.

At the moment she looked not like a young woman of eighteen, but like a girl of thirteen or fourteen. A divine tenderness welled up in him, a tenderness so acute and intense and reverent that it swept passion before it and scattered it to the winds.

"And now that you know, darling, that what I feel for you is due to my red corpuscled blood, you don't want to throw me over?"

"No."

"Betty, that means, doesn't it, that you believe the other feeling may come some day?"

"No, Richard, no."

Her tone conveyed repugnance and contempt. Perplexed, he stared at her for a few moments, then he put his arm about her, and drew her gently to his breast.

With a little sob she surrendered herself to his embrace. Her eyes were closed, but the eyelids fluttered lightly, like the wings of a bird not wholly at rest. A dull, smoldering resentment began to burn in him because of this unforeseen barrier which was interposing itself between them. He realized that he lacked the experience to tear this barrier away, and this realization was a new source of bitterness and rancor. He suspected that if he had led what is commonly described as a man's life, if he had had experience with women, he might not now be so utterly at loss as to the path to pursue in making Betty look at "things" in a normal way. He was paying the penalty of a pure life. Disgust, and a wholesome, invincible respect for his own body, which in its reverent intensity was almost Greek in character, had made him keep to the narrow path of clean living. Richard had a very deep-rooted respect for nature which was all the stronger because he was unconscious of it, and this unquestioning respect for

nature and her methods made Betty's attitude all the more inexplicable to him. Moreover, it seemed horribly unfair that this attitude on the part of the girl he loved should have been his portion, because he had lived so cleanly in every respect.

For once his ready sympathy with others failed him. He did not guess how turbulent were the thoughts that inhabited the head resting placidly upon his shoulder. Betty was trying to reconstruct her little world, which had come crashing about her ears. Her idol had clay feet. He was not divine—merely human—in Betty's cruel young eyes a little less than human. But her native optimism would not allow her to sink into a slough of despond. She reminded herself that for some time she must have suspected this subconsciously more than half, since she had so vociferously assured herself over and over again that he was unlike other men in this one respect as in all others, and vociferous asseveration of one's belief is usually the index of faith at low ebb. At any rate, if Dicky shared the curious desires of mankind at large, she was quite certain that there was no man alive who did not, and so, according to her woman's logic, her Dicky, since he was Dicky, still stood head and shoulders above everyone else.

She supposed that she would have to endure her husband's embrace as other women had endured theirs before her. Women, it seemed, were foredoomed to be martyrs and sufferers in one way or another. At least that is the way it appeared to her.

Roughly speaking, women, as regards virtue, are of three kinds. In the first class belongs the woman who is irremediably a courtesan, and who, no matter what her station and income, continues a courtesan because impropriety has a charm for her and irregularity presents a glamour. In the second class belongs the woman

who has remained virtuous because temptation either did not come her way, or was not great enough to lure her. This class comprises by far the greatest number of women, and their virtue is more or less a matter of accident; being normal, they might have been tempted, being tempted, they might have been led astray. The reason that the largest number of women in this class keep to the narrow, thorny path of virtue is that the path, after all, is not so very narrow and thorny in the case of the average woman. Then, too, the man in question may have been a bungler in the arts of seduction.

In the third class belongs the woman who is temperamentally incapable of going wrong, because she does not know the meaning of passion. The consummation of marriage is to her a concession made to man's lower nature, and no consideration under the sun can impel her to leave the path of virtue, except under the sanction of the law. For marriage to her is a divergence from virtue, celibacy the only state of purity possible. She marries for a host of reasons, never for the natural one. The status which marriage confers upon the woman, a betterment of herself in a financial way, affection, a romantic attachment, because it is the custom, curiosity—these are the lode-stones that drag her into the matrimonial net. After marriage, she remains passively hostile to her husband, and passes through life half-awake, half-asleep, not infrequently bearing children, yet remaining a virgin in feeling and complimenting herself upon the fact as upon a colossal achievement in saintliness. Her coldness vindicates her in her own eyes for her lapse into the married state. Medical science calls such women defective.

Betty belonged to the third class. The brutal cynicism of her mother had fortified her attitude. She felt

certain that she alone was right. She would either have to lose Richard, his companionship and affection, or submit to the inevitable. There was no help for it. She would have to make the best of things. And as there is no time like the present, she decided to make the burnt offering at once.

"Dicky!"

"Yes, Betty?"

"Dick, I'll do as you wish, dear. If you wish to get married soon—I am willing."

He looked at her in amazement. For one moment he thought that she had changed her viewpoint. Then he understood.

"You mean, without loving me, you are willing to yield yourself in marriage?"

"I mean," she corrected him gently, "that I love you so well that I am willing to submit to what is unavoidable."

She spoke proudly. The beautiful face had lost its childish expression of sweet obstinacy. The pride of having conquered herself, of having partially renounced her own criterion, gave her an almost regal air, and the tragic element of the episode made her appear for the first time as a thorough, full-fledged woman. Some quality about her awed him. He was filled with wonder that, though appearing so wholly a woman, she was not entirely a woman. At the moment it was not so much pity for her, or tenderness for her child nature, or love or sympathy, but pride and self-respect.

"It's not to be thought of. I would not think of marrying you after all you have said, until your attitude in regard to marriage is changed materially."

"I think you should be satisfied with the change that has already occurred," she said.

"But I'm not," he assured her. If he dared say to her what he thought—that, loving her as he did, he would not, could not, degrade her by marrying her unless she fully responded to his love. He essayed to formulate the thought in language which would not be offensive to her, but did not succeed. He could not be raw with her. He was astonished to find himself thus frank with himself. He was amazed furthermore at the sudden knowledge of things vouchsafed him, and not the least wonder of it all was that his vocabulary was enlarging to keep pace with the enlargement of his horizon.

"Betty," he said, "can't you try to look at it in this light? It is nature's way of providing for the perpetuation of the race."

"Richard, are we never to leave the subject?"

"But, dearest—children—surely you care. . .?"

"When we marry, I shall expect to assume all the duties of a wife."

Her inflexibility, her frigidity, was beginning to wear him out. He experienced a feeling akin to physical fatigue. But his passion did not abate. He felt desperate.

"Betty," he said, "isn't there some older woman whom you could speak to about this? There are things I cannot say to you. . . ."

"Certainly not," said Betty. "I would allow no one to discuss such matters with me except yourself. Remember, Dick, I have told you I will marry you whenever you wish. More than that you cannot expect of me, for surely you cannot demand that I pretend to emotions of which I am totally ignorant."

Richard became intensely excited.

"Surely you are too honest to *pretend* to anything that is not true," he said. "It's like cheating at cards."

"Very well, I am glad you do not wish me to cheat you," Betty retorted.

"Darling," he whispered desperately, "I want to teach you to look forward to marriage as a completion, a culmination of our spiritual unity."

"I consider ourselves bound in a spiritual unity so inviolable that it requires neither culmination nor completion."

He caught his breath. He had played his trump card without avail. He sat and looked at her, broodingly. How wonderfully beautiful she was!

He noted her many perfections, as if they had been new to him; the arched red mouth, with its upward dip, the mass of black hair falling about the alabaster column of throat. Her skin exerted the chief fascination upon Richard, because it was not dusky, like the average brunette's, but a dazzling, pearly white. At the temples the skin was so fine and delicate that it revealed a network of blue veins.

He thought of Charmides, and he no longer wondered at the mad ecstasy that drove him to shower kisses upon the statue of the goddess. Mad thoughts bubbled through his brain. In the studio of a sculptor whom he had met through Telfer's, he had seen the life-size statue of a New York society woman. It pleased Richard to think that if he possessed such a statue of Betty he would take an infinite joy in folding in his arms the cold marble, in madly kissing the unresponsive presentment of arms and shoulders and bosom.

There was something of the feminine in Richard Pryce, as there is in all artists. He was capable of running through as many moods in an hour, or a minute, as the most capricious of women. Suddenly the sight of Betty, so cold and self-possessed, made him furious. He began pounding up and down the room,

flinging question after question at her, and accusations as well. He accused her of being willfully cold to torment him. In the next breath, wholly unconscious of the inconsistency, he told her that she was cheating herself of the greatest joy which life holds in store for anyone. Betty had seen him furious upon minor provocations before, and fortunately had sufficient self-command to refrain from retorting. She knew that in half an hour he would be on his knees begging her pardon for words which he remembered were cruel but which themselves he would not be able to recall by that time.

She propped herself up comfortably on her pillows, and allowed the emotional tornado to sweep over her. Just then the anticlimax occurred. Nora entered the room, without knocking, and announced that a man from a restaurant was below, with dinner. What was she to do? Bring it upstairs?

Richard laughed hoarsely.

"You may eat it yourself for all I care," he said, and strode from the room, downstairs and out of the house.

## CHAPTER VIII

"Hello, my dear chap; glad to see you—yes, I'm just back from Europe!"

A tall, square-shouldered, singularly handsome and debonair man shook hands effusively with Richard, but the effusiveness of his greeting was tinged with a surface veneer and deliberate grace of manner which hallmarked the debonair gentleman as being of the stage. His enunciation was that of a Chumley; his manner Chesterfieldian.

Betty, sitting on the gallery that ran lengthwise of the store, where she superintended the mail order girls on mornings when business was dull in her own department, looked curiously over the railing to get another glimpse of the individual who had caused the general hubbub, for the girls had all become pleasantly flustered, pink-cheeked and bright-eyed. Now that the roseate and golden mists of the Arcadian landscape had been dissipated, she was ready once more to take a normal interest in the rest of the world, not that she loved her Dick less, but the quality of blind admiration which had made a unique thing of her love had died the day she made the cruel discovery that her Dicky was only human. And as her passion still slumbered, if, indeed, it was ever to be aroused, thre was no other feeling to take the place of her dead, blind worship of him.

Having completed the amenities of greeting, the handsome gentleman inquired of Richard:

"Mr. Telfer not down yet? It is almost eleven. Really, I shall have to discharge him."

The girls giggled.

"Ain't he the jollier?" stage-whispered Miss Connors to Miss Sharpe, a lackadaisical Polish-American Jewess who prided herself upon her "elegant" vocabulary and "ladylike" manners. Miss Sharpe's name had originally been Schapirowitz, but, at the early age of nine, her astute Jewish mind, further polished and sharpened by an American public school, perceived the very obvious advantages of Americanizing her name, which she had proceeded to do by easy stages. The cycle of changes read, "Schapirowitz, Schapiro, Shapiro, Shap, Shaap, Sharp, Sharpe—an evolution as astounding sociologically as the physiological changes recounted by Professor Haeckel as occurring to the human embryo.

"He is handsomer than ever," said Miss Sharpe.

These varying expressions of sincere admiration left Betty as much in the dark as before as to the debonair gentleman's identity. He was insolently handsome; his personality was striking enough to be termed aggressive; all in all it was impossible to ignore him, but much as she wanted to know who he was, she was too proud to ask either of the two girls. Betty was slightly old-fashioned. She thought it bad taste to evince an interest in any man. Just then she heard Richard, in answering, address the stranger as "Mr. Telfer." Then Betty knew that the radiant personage was Mr. Telfer's actor-son, who had been summering abroad, and who was cast in the titular rôle of a play called "The Sun-God," heralded as "the most spectacular show ever produced on any stage."

Archibald Telfer followed Richard across the floor to Richard's private office, a dignity to which Richard had attained since his promotion. Half across the

main room he halted and turned. Betty could not suppress a smile as she realized how neatly he had computed the exact distance which would allow him to glance up to the gallery without being forced to assume an ungraceful attitude or to crane his neck unduly.

"I perceive," he said, bowing with mock gallantry, "that the gallery goddesses are still there." His eye fell upon Betty. For a moment he stood silent. The insolent, handsome face did not move a muscle. The only indication of having seen her which he gave was a barely perceptible kindling of the eyes. Then he raised his hat once more—bowing pointedly to Betty only.

"I salute the new goddess," he said; "when she descends from the clouds, I hope to be introduced."

Turning on his heel, he prodded Richard's waistline with his stick, and said:

"Come on, Pryce, I want a little talk with you."

Richard, looking anything but pleased, walked into his office, holding open the door for "the old man's son" with very poor grace.

"Oh, my dear, I wish they would leave the door open so we could see him. Ain't he the one grand thing?" sighed Miss Connors. "In a world of ugly men, ain't it a sight for sore eyes to see the handsomest creature that ever walked on two pins without having to pay fifty cents for a back seat in the peanut gallery for the privolidge? Ain't it now, honist?"

Miss Sharpe smiled indulgently. Her liquid, almond-shaped eyes had deepened in intensity, telling plainly as words that she too was not unimpressed by Archie Telfer's pleasing exterior.

"I know a girl," pursued Miss Connors, "who goes to the show he plays in year after year onct a week in purfurence to seeing other plays just so she can look

him over. That girl's in love with him. Yes, ma'am," she concluded, "she's plum crazy about him."

"Really?" inquired Miss Sharpe, weighing the little word down with as much emphasis as it could possibly carry. Her irony was too fine to check Miss Connor's flow of eloquence now she had a subject worthy of it.

"Sure thing—daffy, that's what she is about him. But he is a good-looker, and no mistake. Why, merely to see him sit down is an edoocation in Delsheart movements."

She paused, rolled and gummed into a wrapper the sheet of music she was handling. Then she turned to Betty. Had Miss Garside ever seen him sit down?

Betty had not, as she told Miss Connors frigidly. Then, chin in air, she walked away, furious with herself for having betrayed even a superficial interest in anyone who interested these two vulgarians.

Archie Telfer, meanwhile, had performed the rite which Miss Connors described as a part of the "Delsheartian edoocation."

"Well, Richard," he exclaimed with much show of good-fellowship, "I haven't seen the governor yet. Hale and hearty as always, I suppose? Wonderful constitution for a man of his age. Yes, I'm just off the boat."

"What boat did you come on?" asked Richard, in order to say something. Archie Telfer always irritated him unaccountably.

"The *Proteus*."

"The *Proteus?* Why, she got in three days ago," exclaimed Richard in surprise.

Archie Telfer sounded the laugh which a groveling press in appraising the value of each individual perfection of the "Adonis of the Stage" had valued at a hundred dollars a week. Richard became more and more angry. He could not have said why.

"There was no reason under the sun, my dear boy," said Archie Telfer, the soft, resonant laugh having died away, "why I should inflict myself upon the poor man the moment I landed because he happens to be my father—particularly in view of my marital entanglements."

"What?" exclaimed Richard in surprise. "Did you get married this summer?"

"Softly, softly, my good fellow, not yet. But no less than three ladies are at present aspiring to the advantage of my hand and name."

Richard looked uncomfortable. He suspected some unsavory story.

Archie Telfer pulled out a cigarette case of lizard skin with monogram mounted in diamonds. He offered Richard a cigarette. Richard declined. Archie, in lighting his, performed the fifty-dollar-a-week parcel of his attractions. Archie Telfer always used his own blend of cigarettes—a small package of which was given free to each matinee idolater at every hundredth matinee during the season. Miss Connors, smelling the aromatic weed, almost burst into tears because she had not see him light it.

Archie continued suavely: "Of course, such an imbroglio would be impossible for you, who are a Joseph. But I am not a Joseph. I love the ladies, God bless 'em. And they love me. God bless 'em again."

He inhaled the smoke luxuriously and sat regarding Richard with a satisfied air. Like many another man of lax morality, Archie Telfer's manner was quite impeccable. Richard, looking at him, felt a sudden tightening of the heart strings. This man was lionized wherever he went. Although his person was groomed to a finish, and his manner overlaid with a myriad of petty artifices, he was still a man of intense masculinity, while

in Richard, in spite of the mad jets of passion which flared and burned in him, the woman-nature was always more or less apparent, as perhaps it is in all men in whom the artistic sense predominates. The streak of femininity in him came to the surface now. He felt a singular desire to take Archie Telfer into his confidence. Reason, saner than emotion, cautioned him to beware of the man and whispered that spiritual communion with him must needs bring spiritual pollution.

Archie was everything that Richard was not. He was frankly a debauchee, glorying in and boastful of his career as a libertine. He was not overscrupulous in money matters. He regarded his art merely as a livelihood and played up his personal beauty whenever and wherever he could. A moment ago Richard had hated him, but his tortured and harrowed nerves, like a woman's, swung now to the opposite extreme. He felt a sudden fascination for the man, not in spite of his wickedness, but because of it. Richard felt vaguely that Archie, known as a pastmaster of every seductive art, might be able to help him and advise him how to overcome Betty's strange frame of mind. The thought, now he had formulated it, seemed odious to Richard. He shrank with something akin to shame from himself who would have discussed Betty's purity with this man. Nevertheless the longing to wrest from Archie the secret of his success with women remained. Richard was beginning to feel his inability to awaken Betty as a personal shortcoming, and this longing made Richard more placable in conversation than it was his custom with Archie Telfer.

"I am not a Joseph," resumed Archie Telfer. "I can tell you, my dear Pryce, there is no pleasure on earth comparable to the pursuit of a woman. Don't look shocked, my dear boy. No man is wholly a man until

he has become an infallible judge of the eternal feminine. To be that means to be master of the situation, and the pleasures, after the chase has been successfully completed and the game run to cover, are not to be despised."

He smoked in silence. Richard told himself that even to enter into a conversation with this man who spoke thus lightly of women was despicable. But a blind, unreasoning force seemed to push him on.

"Tell me, Archie," he said, leaning forward and speaking in an undertone, as if ashamed of his own words, "did you ever fail with a woman?"

The fifty-dollar-a-week laugh again enriched the unappreciative air.

"My dear boy, that question is indeed a prodigious compliment."

"But did you?"

"I wish to goodness I had failed with at least one of the present trio," sighed Archie. "Think of it—my dear boy—three breach of promise suits in the courts against me, at one time. But what a lot of free advertising 'The Sun-God' will get out of it, eh?"

"Defending the suits will cost you a pretty penny, won't it?"

"I may marry one of the three at the last moment in order to make the other two suits impossible. I tell you, my dear chap, this three-ring circus will get me a full-page write-up in every enterprising Sunday paper in town. The seat sale starts next Monday—two months in advance of the opening night, and they have four paper baskets of mail orders in the box office even now. Think what the seat sale will be after the story of my triplicate of would-be wives gets into the papers. On the whole I do not regret my triangular conquest."

"All three this summer?" Richard hated himself for

feeling something vaguely approaching envy. The masculine element in him was in abeyance at the moment, the feminine was in the ascendant. He experienced the anomalous emotion of whole-heartedly regretting the clean life he had led, not for the sake of pleasure foregone but of wisdom ungathered.

"All three," Archie replied, inhaling the smoke from his cigarette with huge satisfaction. "Tell me, Richard, you don't look up to the mark. Like Hamlet, you appear to be in a morbid frame of mind. 'Man contents me not—no, nor woman either, though by your smiles you seem to say so.' You are making a mistake, my boy, in wasting your life in interpreting all too rigidly the meaning of celibacy. Take it from one who has never regretted his misspent youth. The only way to live is to enjoy, to enjoy fastidiously and moderately, day by day, night by night, week by week. 'Wine, women and laughter'—old Martin Luther's all-embracing doctrine of life is the sum of every sane man's philosophy."

"Isn't there a line in Shakespeare," Richard asked innocently, which runs, 'The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose'? Poor old Martin Luther, to be thus abused."

Archie Telfer laughed.

"And there was good old Samuel Johnson," he said. "You remember, don't you, what he said to David Garrick? 'Nay, nay, Davie, I'll come no more behind your scenes, for the white bosoms and silk stockings of your actresses excite my amorous propensities.' "

Richard sat stonily silent. He regretted having entered into this conversation, but his suffering had corroded the marrow of his moral resistance. He hated himself for it, but he wanted to hear more of this man's blatant immorality.

"What's the matter, Pryce?" asked Archie. "I've never seen you so down in the mouth. I'm no fortune-teller, but I'll hazard one guess. You're in love, and your inamorata does not return your passion. Am I right?"

"I am in love," Richard replied. His voice grew husky at the mere thought of Betty. Until now he had confided the agony which had been his daily portion for the past months to no one. Now that his reticence had suffered the first breach, he was ready to pour himself out to the first chance listener. He would have voiced his lamentations to a statue.

"I'm crazily, idiotically, in love," Richard continued. "I never imagined it would be like this. It's just hell, that's what it is, and yet I wouldn't part with the feeling for worlds."

"Did you try to win her or did you ask her to marry you?"

Richard flushed.

"Naturally, I asked her to marry me," he said.

"I beg your pardon. I might have known it. Of course you belong to the type of man who, because of a fleeting infatuation, finds it incumbent to offer to support the woman, who inspires it, for life."

Richard frowned. He wished to retort, but his mind, all jangled and out of tune with suppressed passion, was no match at the moment for the worldly-wise, gracefully philosophical mind of Archie Telfer.

"How foolish you are, Richard," Archie continued, "to take yourself so seriously. Do you suppose a normal man falls in love only once in a lifetime? Romantic love, pah!—there is no such thing! I assure you, as a man gains in experience, the chase is the principal feature. At times I prolong it purposely—one drinks a cocktail slowly at times when one's appetite is low.

Come, my dear fellow, you haven't told me yet what the trouble is. Doesn't she reciprocate your—ahem—love?"

Again a tocsin of warning sounded somewhere inside of Richard's brain. But his nerves were demoralized to the degree reached by a horse when, from fear of fire, it leaps directly into the flames.

"She has promised to marry me," he said, as warily as he could.

"Marriage and love are not synonymous."

"She loves me."

"Then what's wrong? Who, by the way, is the lady?"

"Never mind who she is."

Archie Telfer looked hard at Richard and understood. He laughed.

"The new gallery goddess," he said.

"Don't call her that."

"What then?"

"She takes my position as chief clerk and pianist."

"Very well. I'll call her your divinity instead of goddess. And now that her identity is established, I think I can diagnose the trouble. A perambulating iceberg, eh?"

"I don't care for the expression."

"Come, come, my dear boy, cultivate a sense of humor. It helps one over many rough bumps, even the bumps of an iceberg."

Richard bit his lip. This served him right, he thought bitterly, for broaching the subject of his love to this roué. It was insufferable that Archie should suspect Betty's identity.

"No woman is really cold," said Archie. "I dare say she is merely a consummate little hypocrite."

"She is not a hypocrite," Richard retorted hotly. "She is the sweetest and purest girl imaginable. She is so pure that she cannot even comprehend passion." Even

to defend Betty to this man was to pollute her and the sacred albeit normal love he felt for her.

Archie Telfer once more sounded the famous fifty-dollar-a-week laugh.

"My dear boy," he said, "the whole trouble lies with you. Man is the player, woman the instrument, as a clever writer once remarked. Your passion has swept you off your feet. Even icebergs can be made to melt, though whether at a thousand or two Celcius or Fahrenheit I cannot say. But the feat of thawing a cold woman does not lie in the actual temperature of the man's love so much as in the judicious, pyrotechnical display he makes of it."

"What a disgusting materialist you are!"

"Thanks, I am. I glory in being just that. I can parallel my last remark by an example in acting. Poor actors declare they feel every emotion they portray. The clever actor never permits himself to feel while acting. With him acting is a matter of intelligence, warmed and tinctured by the memory of restrained feelings, not by feelings themselves."

"You haven't any more heart than a stone."

"Quite true. But now I will prove to you that I, materialist or sensualist, whichever you called me, am more controlled than yourself. I can win any woman by an infallible method, while you can not. Whether in love with her or not, I control my real emotions so admirably that I impress her merely with the delicacy of love, not with its grossness."

"In other words, you merely act as if you were on the stage."

"If you like, call it that. At any rate, I never offend a woman by too openly displaying my emotions."

Richard rose from his chair and strode excitedly

through the room. He ran his fingers through his hair nervously again and again.

"I wonder if it was that," he said suddenly, speaking to himself rather than to Archie. "I wonder if it was that."

"Look here, Pryce, I would like to ask you a question. Are you still a Joseph, or in the interim since I last saw you, have you perchance lost your virtue?"

Richard crimsoned angrily.

"Your question is outrageous," he said. "I have told you I do not know how many times that to me purity is as essential in a man as in a woman. There is no reason why a man should go scot free for committing the offense which brands a woman as a pariah."

"Hear! Hear!" Archie held his cigarette between his lips, and having freed his hand from its incumbrance, applauded vigorously. Flushing, Richard sat down and stared at Archie sullenly.

"My dear fellow," Archie continued, "if I could only bring you to realize how ridiculous and untenable is your position. If you intended running as simple a mechanism as a steam launch, you would first try to gain a little experience of its contraptions. Yet you intend plunging headlong into matrimony. It is reckless, Richard, really reckless!"

Richard stared at the other in mute disapproval. His signal lack of poise, due to the demoralized condition of his nervous system, made him utterly incapable of coping with the brilliant though shallow sophistry of this Adonis of the stage.

"Look here, Pryce," Archie went on, "I have an invitation to go out of town on a twenty-four hours' cruise down the bay on a private yacht. I know the chap who invited me well enough to ask to bring a

friend. Will you come? It's a stag-party—but there will be ladies, and they will all be good-lookers."

Richard looked at the other uncomprehendingly.

"What in thunder do you mean?" he asked. "A stag-party—and ladies?"

"Yes, Simple Simon, just so. The married men are not bringing their marriage licenses, their wedding rings or their wives."

Richard rose, white to the lips.

"You hound," he said. "If you weren't the old man's son I'd throw you out."

Archie Telfer merely laughed. The sonorous, beautiful timbred laugh echoed and re-echoed through the long, narrow main floor. He laughed twice the length of the period prescribed by the fifty-dollar-a-week gauge. The gallery goddesses raised their eyes in mute ecstasy.

Having artistically rounded out that classic laugh, Archie rose.

"I bear you no ill-will, Pryce," he said. "Lunatics should be treated compassionately. I will even do you a good turn. I'll give you an object lesson in love-making. Introduce me to your divinity, and I'll lay you a wager of five ponies that I'll contrive a way of thawing her."

"You cur," said Richard, between clenched teeth.

Archie Telfer rose, smiling.

"What an ungracious little boy," he said in an indulgent tone, as if addressing a child. Then, aggrievedly: "I am a man of honor, Richard. I never encroach on another man's preserves, especially when I have so many more rabbits than he within my own compound."

He opened the door.

"Since you refuse to introduce me," he said, "I will

introduce myself. You had better stop pouting and come out and watch me."

Betty had come down from the gallery and had seated herself at the piano. Beside her, on the bench, lay several sheets of new music, which she had brought with her to play for herself before playing them for prospective purchasers. She was running her fingers over the piano, trying this scale and that, to limber up her fingers before essaying the difficult music before her. It was program music—a sonata entitled "Good Friday," and as she played the austerely beautiful opening bar and broke into the first theme, vibrant with religious fervor, Richard, standing behind Archie Telfer, thrilled to the finger tips with reverent love for the girl who had promised to be his wife. She looked very lovely sitting there in the somber half-light of the cavernous long store, under the one electric light which she had turned on to light the music she was reading. Her mourning heightened her pallor and helped weave the illusive vision that she was a religious devotee. For a moment Richard forgot Archie Telfer. Then he remembered him overwhelmingly.

The Adonis of the Stage was attitudinizing shamelessly. He held his hat in his hand, above his stick. The handsome head was bowed, as if in unconscious reverence. The bright dark eyes gazed meditatively at the young girl, their very expression denoting a kindly veneration. It was a piece of superb acting, and Richard, knowing the man was rotten to the core, felt hatred boiling up in himself. At the moment Richard harked back for untold generations. He became the primitive man—the cave-man, the man who knew no rule save that of club and spear and fang. He could have committed murder at the moment, had a weapon been at hand.

Betty stopped playing. Blinded by the light, and seeing the figure of a man at her side, she mistook Archie for a customer.

Rising, she asked: "Can I do anything for you?"

"You are very kind," said Archie in his resonant acting voice. No one who had ever heard that voice and that tone, "the ideal love-making voice," according to Archie's press-agent, ever forgot it. Betty started.

"I have asked Richard to introduce me, and he, selfish dog, has refused. So I am forced to introduce myself. I am Archibald Telfer."

"Oh, indeed!"

Never in all her life had Betty felt quite so foolish. Being a young girl and human, she could not help being somewhat flurried at thus suddenly seeing the beau ideal of matinee girldom at close range, standing before her in a position denoting humble admiration.

"I think Richard was a little afraid that I would continue with you a conversation I had begun with him."

Betty laughed helplessly. Archie Telfer was a type of man she had never met before, and his very presence made her vaguely uneasy. Certainly he was good to look at, and his pulsing baritone was the most musical speaking voice she had ever heard. But he made her uneasy. She felt an instinctive distrust of him.

"I was telling Richard," Archie continued, nothing daunted by her diffidence, "that some day when I have time—perhaps next summer—I shall give a series of lectures under the title, 'Advice to the Inept Lovelorn.' You see, Miss——" he stopped, looked at Betty softly and caressingly, and his voice was enticingly tender, as he said after a brief pause:

"You haven't handed me your card in return for mine."

"My name is Garside," said Betty stiffly.

"You see, Miss Garside, I honestly believe that many a capital chap has failed to win the woman he loves because his wooing was so clumsy."

"I suppose that is true," Betty conceded.

"And many a woman has failed to capture the man she loved because she was a careless fisherwoman."

"Wouldn't it be nicer to assume that the man is always the captor?" Betty was alarmed at the sound of her own voice, and at the temerity she displayed in taking an active part in the conversation. She was dimly aware also that Miss Sharpe and Miss Connors must be craning their necks in envious curiosity.

"Not at all. To realize how much prettier it is to assume that the woman is the captor and not the captive, you must try to visualize an allegorical painting showing both phases, and done, let us say, in Alma Tadema or Burne-Jones style. Picture, then, the following: A man kneeling before a woman, he bound in garlands made of violets and roses, sweet and effective symbols of the feminine daintiness and charm that bewitches man. The reverse picture is not as pleasing. A man leading a woman loaded down with heavy chains of jeweled gold, emblems of the heavy, clodhopper means the average man resorts to in courtship in order to cover up his own meager intellectual and personal charms."

Betty was struck by his cleverness, but her uneasiness increased. He was so big and handsome and masculine. She wished to think of something to reply, of some clever answer to make, and yet she realized that it would be wiser to terminate the conversation at once. She found herself fancying that, to a girl whose affections were not engaged elsewhere, Archie Telfer might become enormously dangerous.

"Besides," Archie Telfer continued, "if we happen to be disciples of Bernard Shaw, we must believe with him that woman is the pursuer, man the pursued."

"That is perfectly odious," said Betty, not hiding her disgust.

"I suppose the thought put that baldly does sound offensive," Archie said, speaking in a voice light and crisp as thistledown. "At any rate, I am going to give my lectures serious thought."

"They will attract large audiences," said Betty.

"That, of course, will be a new experience for me."

"I beg your pardon," Betty said, laughing. Suddenly she felt at ease with him, and for the first time she looked him squarely between the eyes. Decidedly he was handsome, quite overwhelmingly, aggressively handsome.

"If we believe the comic operas, there are as many different kinds of kisses as there are species of bacteria. But no one has as yet thought of scientifically classifying them. That shall be my task."

"I do not see how you can do it," said Betty.

"Well, you see, I'm an expert, not merely on paper or on the stage."

Betty blushed. Archie Telfer tucked the smile occasioned by Betty's blush into one corner of his mouth, where it was all but invisible, and continued in the same strain.

"And then there are glances. An adept can express so much in a glance. Do you sing, Miss Garside?"

"A little," Betty answered, wondering at the question.

"Well, then, you know that in singing, as in elocution, we must learn to modulate the voice, to get complete control of it. In acting we must learn facial control as well as vocal control, and the expert actor refines on this as much as he pleases and can."

"I see."

"Now the average lover knows how to control his voice. Everyday life teaches him that. But does he know how to make his glances a vehicle of expression?"

"Some men do, don't they?"

"Some, but only a few. There are seven kinds of glances."

"Seven?"

"The glance of greeting, the glance offensive, the glance provocative, the glance of challenge, the glance affectionate, the glance caressing, the glance possessive."

"Goodness, that's very interesting." Betty was infinitely entertained and guileless enough to show it.

"Now let me see whether you can guess which is which."

He glanced cursorily at Betty, lifting his hat.

"The glance of greeting," he said.

It was so obviously that that Betty, to pay him back for his tripping her before, said:

"I thought it was the glance provocative."

"Ah, no, you didn't." He quickly changed his attitude and regarded her with an air so impertinent that she longed to box his ears. He was very clever, to be sure!

In quick succession he illustrated the various glances, all except the glance caressing, throwing so much humor into his acting that Betty laughed heartily more than once. Then he said:

"The glance caressing I dare not illustrate with yourself as the objective, because Richard is within arm's length. Richard," he called, "where are you? Come here, you unamiable scamp, and perceive that I have not yet kidnapped Miss Garside."

The "unamiable dog" was bending over a newly

opened box of music, and was sorting it. He growled out an unintelligible answer, and went on with his work.

Archie Telfer laughed.

"I would classify kisses in the same way—only there are not seven or fifty-seven, but at least seventy-seven different varieties of kisses."

"Seventy-seven?" Betty asked incredulously. "Do enumerate them."

"No, no, not with that volcano back of me ready to envelop me in brimstone and ashes at the least intimation of anything out of the ordinary. I simply dare not."

Betty hated herself for laughing. Richard's ears, which alone were visible, as he was stooping over the box, were a bright pink. She wanted to call out, "Dicky, dear, come here; you are missing a lot of fun," or some other simple, everyday, commonplace little thing that would establish their footing in Archie Telfer's eyes. But she couldn't. She was not yet sufficiently at ease in the effulgent presence of Archie Telfer. She turned to him. She meant to reprove him, and thoroughly believed she was doing it, when she asked:

"Are you really going to illustrate the seventy-seven varieties of kisses on the stage, when you cannot illustrate them in private?"

Archie Telfer came a step nearer to Betty, and bestowed upon her the glance sixth in order as enumerated by himself, the glance which before he had professed not to illustrate because of fear of Richard. He allowed his eyes to linger and to caress, and then, in the softest of tones, he said:

"We can sometimes explain things when a lot of folks are present which are dangerous to speak about when we are alone. Besides, while I could illustrate

the glances by myself, I need some one to receive my illustrations of the seventy-seven varieties."

Betty blushed furiously, and was furious with herself for blushing, furious also for having made the absurd remark which afforded Archie Telfer the opportunity of being impertinent. She wanted to rebuke him, but did not know how.

Archie Telfer meanwhile had tucked his stick under his arm in approved stage fashion, and was drawing a card from a silver-cornered leather cardcase.

"I'll be grateful to you for seeing my father gets this," he said, handing her the card. Betty had risen, with the intention of placing the same on Mr. Telfer's desk in his private room. Archie Telfer began to walk toward the door, while he continued to speak. Betty, willy-nilly, was forced to walk along in order to hear what he said. Archie threw Richard, fuming and red, a killing look of triumph as Betty, wholly unconscious of the little comedy weaving itself about her, walked along at Archie's side.

"I really don't know whether I am right in troubling you," he said. "You're my father's private secretary, aren't you?" he asked, although he knew perfectly well she was not.

"Mr. Telfer's secretary is away for a week," Betty replied, "and I am trying to write the few letters that go out from Mr. Telfer's private office for him on the machine, so, in a fashion, I suppose I may describe myself as acting secretary."

"You succeed, of course?"

"Your father is indulgent enough to say I do."

Archie Telfer glanced at her. He was quick at divining character. He liked her aristocratic way of carrying herself, and the pure, well-modeled profile, with its mass of black hair, the tiny tendrils climbing away from

ebony billows. He liked her gentle way of speaking and her indifferent manner.

He was just a little tired of women with temperament. He had no idea of engaging in a serious flirtation with this slim, dark-eyed, dark-haired girl, but he imagined that it would be pleasant and soothing, a great relief from his troubles, to chat occasionally with this suave creature in whom the eternal feminine was so well kept in the background,—in which it seemed a mere external quality, and in no way a perpetual challenge, as in so many women, to his own masculinity.

To make her speak, he inquired:

"What do you do here as a rule?"

"Oh, I play new music,—songs, dances, sonatas, and old music, too, for that matter, for prospective purchasers." Then swiftly, quoting from the firm's advertising booklet, she added: "A purchase of five dollars entitles purchaser to have one of Telfer's expert pianists play any desired selection for the period of a half-hour; a purchase of ten dollars entitles purchaser to have one of Telfer's expert pianists play any desired selection for the period of an hour; and a purchase of twenty-five dollars entitles purchaser to have one of Telfer's expert pianists call at purchaser's residence to play any desired selection for any length of time."

"A very easy way, I should say, of getting a delightful young lady to call on one," Archie retorted, laughing.

Betty did not know whether to take this as an impertinence or not. Wisely, she decided to ignore the sally. Certainly, Mr. Telfer's son presented undreamed of conversational vistas. But he worried her subtly. She felt very much as a paralyzed man feels at whose feet a cannon fire-cracker has suddenly fallen, and of which it is impossible to say whether it is lighted or not.

"If you are a musician," Archie Telfer continued

easily, "it will interest you to know that we had several celebrities of the musical world aboard the steamer. Caruso, Sembrich, Direktor Markheim of the Metropolitan Opera. Has he been here yet?"

"No—that is—I don't know. I have never seen him."

"You would have been told by some one that it was he. He and my esteemed parent are great cronies. Father thinks Markheim couldn't run the opera company without him and his advice. And Markheim is just as fat as my father. Their mutual affliction of being overweights further cements their friendship. Wait till you see them ambling through the store side by side. There won't be room left on either side of them for a sheet of paper. Then there was Earlcote, Stanley Earlcote."

"Who is he?"

"Who is—— You don't mean to say you have never heard of Stanley Earlcote, the most picturesque personality of the twentieth century?"

"I confess my ignorance with shame."

"Well, if reports are to be credited, he is—or was—the most wonderful pianist that ever lived."

"Is, or was?" queried Betty. "You speak as if he were dead."

"Worse than dead—disabled by being trampled upon by the pet elephant of the Gaekwar of Hajaputani, which had broken away from his mahout. Earlcote had spent three years in India at the Court of the Gaekwar, and during those three years all personages of consequence that heard him, from the Viceroy of India to the Crown Prince of Germany, vied with each other in trumpeting his fame through Europe, so that his return to civilized parts was looked forward to with hysterical excitement in musical circles. A week before his projected return the accident happened. The

pet elephant trampled upon Earlcote, injuring his spine, mutilating his hands, making the career to which he had looked fórward to, and which would have been a career of unexampled triumph, impossible."

Archie Telfer made a rhetorical pause.

"How horrible," exclaimed Betty.

"The Gaekwar, heartbroken by the accident which had overtaken his favorite, loaded him down with gifts of Oriental splendor and richness. Stanley Earlcote is fabulously wealthy, and it is said that he owes his tremendous fortune to the Gaekwar, who, among other treasures, presented him with the Kasi-nook."

"And what is the Kasi-nook?" Betty inquired.

"The Kasi-nook is the largest and most beautiful black opal in existence. Earlcote wears it continually as a watch-charm. A superstition attaches to the gem."

"Does it bring bad luck?"

"It is said to. This is the verse all the papers printed at the time the Gaekwar presented Earlcote with the gem, some four years ago:

"Honestly come by
  Fortune and joy
And health it will buy.
Dishonestly come by
  Health, wealth and joy,
It will surely destroy."

"What an extraordinary story. Is he an Englishman or an American?"

"An American—Bostonian. However, there is a rumor extant that his mother was a descendant of one of the famous New Orleans octoroons, the women who were famous for their beauty and infamous in character, and who flourished in the old quarter in New Orleans for generations before the Civil War."

Betty's face expressed scornful disdain.

"Of course this is merely a rumor," Archie Telfer continued easily. "The papers, of course, have avidly seized upon the story of his doubtful antecedents. If it is true that Earlcote has negro blood in his veins, it would explain his marvelously temperamental playing."

"You have heard him play?"

"No, but I have read volumes about it. While on board several ladies begged him to play, but he refused, pleading that he endured agonies after playing. A few days later a concert was given to aid some steerage passengers who were sufferers from a flood. Earlcote was again asked to play, and again refused. One of the coal barons was on board, and commissioned some ladies to tell Earlcote that he offered to contribute ten thousand dollars to the fund they were raising, if Earlcote would consent to play Chopin's two line prelude."

"Did he play it?"

"No, he refused again."

"He cannot be very charitable," Betty said sternly. "Surely, if he is able to play at all, the pain he suffers in consequence cannot be so intense as to warrant a refusal of that sort."

Archie Telfer laughed.

"You haven't heard all. Earlcote's refusal was tendered in a way no king could have bettered. He wrote out a check for twenty thousand dollars and handed that to the two ladies."

"What an extraordinary man! How does he look? Does he show his mixed blood?"

"He is not as dark as a Spaniard or a Mexican, but his eyes have a strange fire. As to his looks—well, should you ever meet him, you had better be careful; you might fall in love with him."

Betty drew back startled. The introduction of pointed

remarks into an impersonal talk was a conversational phase for which her limited experience with men had not prepared her. Her eyes looked troubled. Archie said blandly:

"He is so very, very ugly, you know—and it is opposites that attract."

The troubled look in Betty's eyes deepened. She was not clever in talk with strangers, and she did not know how to reply to Archie Telfer.

"Besides, Miss Garside," he continued suavely, "it is a well-known fact that extreme ugliness, grotesque ugliness, can exert a great fascination."

"It would never fascinate me," said Betty. "I love beauty. I know, of course, that the modern ideal of art is to portray character in painting and sculpture instead of classical beauty, but in that respect I am hopelessly old-fashioned and out of date, for I love beauty."

"An Adonis, then, is more to your taste than a Caliban?"

Betty was about to reply in the affirmative when she remembered that Archie's cognomen was the Adonis of the Stage. Her lips closed and the color in her cheek deepened. Never in all her life had she felt so uncomfortable. As has been said before, she was not clever in conversation—dreamers usually lack the acute sense of timeliness that makes for conversational prowess, but she felt blindly that she must make some retort.

"In sculpture, by all means."

"In flesh and blood?"

This was intolerable of him. She replied, showing some spirit:

"I prefer some defect—good-looking men, they tell me, are unbelievably conceited." She flushed a little, having sped her arrow.

Archie Telfer laughed. He was a good sportsman, and could take a blow without losing his temper.

"I'll have to tell Richard that," he said slyly. "Do you think it will please him?"

So Archie Telfer knew! Betty heaved a sigh of relief. She felt as if the name "Richard" could conjure away all impending ill.

"Why not?" she asked, laughing. "Dicky's nose isn't quite straight. I love him for it."

"Contradictory, like all women," sighed Archie, "and not ashamed to tell one man that you love another."

"Not merely not ashamed, but proud," Betty retorted, chin in air.

Archie put out his hand and Betty extended hers.

"I envy Richard," declared Archie enviously. His face was the mirror of every manly virtue as he added:

"What wouldn't I give to have a sweet, pure little girl like you love me?"

"Unless your press agent invents all the stories one reads," Betty said, laughing, "there is no dearth of little girls for you to choose from."

"My press agent," Archie retorted gracefully, "is at times an unconscionable liar." He shook his head sadly. "Sometimes, again, he tells the truth. He will soon print an extravagant story of three women who are quarreling about the privilege of becoming my wife."

"Oh!" Betty was reduced to a monosyllable.

Archie Telfer simulated embarrassment, as, with downcast eyes, he poked his stick at the door, for they had reached the front of the store by this time, and were standing in full view of the street.

"A woman as sweet and pure as yourself, Miss Garside," he said, "is unable to comprehend the machinations to which some women will descend. You must believe me when I tell you that never, never did I make

love to any one of those three women, and yet each one claims that I asked her to marry me. Why, Miss Garside," Archie Telfer walked back a few steps, and sitting down on one of the small tables on which was displayed new sheet music, gracefully beat a tattoo with his stick against a comely small foot encased in faultless patent leather, "I never made love to them any more than I am making love to you just now! And yet they claim that I wanted to marry them. As if I would be likely to care for flirting and love-making!" He sighed deeply, as if saddened by the turpitude of womankind. "Think of the love-making *I have got to get through with* on the stage eight times a week through the season, and then ask yourself whether I would care to make love and flirt off the stage as well."

Betty laughed. Innocent as she was, she was not simple enough to be duped by Archie's lachrymose manner. She was infinitely entertained, and her amusement had a double edge, for she was amused both by the man and by the actor.

Archie gracefully withdrew from the table on which he had been sitting.

"I almost feel," he said, "like disappointing all three by going off and marrying someone else—some sweet little girl, you know."

His glances conveyed very plainly which sweet little girl he had in view for the distinction to be conferred. It was impossible to be angry with such colossal impudence. Betty laughed, and holding up the card he had given her before, she concluded:

"I will see your father receives this as soon as he gets in."

Turning, without giving him a chance to say more, she walked to the rear of the store, and after placing the card on Mr. Telfer's desk, entered Richard's private office.

A curious weakness of humanity makes the recipient of a compliment, although realizing the insincerity of the compliment, feel buoyant and satisfied with the world in general. Betty, in spite of the fact that she was in love with her Richard, was no exception to the general rule.

"Oh, Dicky," she said, "isn't he handsome?"

Richard did not look up from his desk.

"And what a wonderful speaking voice he has."

No answer, but the papers on Dicky's desk were in wild, fluttering commotion.

"And Dicky, how gracefully he expressed himself."

Richard's right hand plowed its remorseless way through his hair. He rose, and stood confronting Betty, looking very pale and handsome and boyish.

"Betty," he said, "he's the worst man in New York."

"Really?"

Perhaps no other word in the English language, consciously or unconsciously, can be used to better purpose in tantalizing the person to whom it is addressed than this expletive. Richard choked with mortification and jealousy.

"Betty, you're not, you're not——"

"Not what——?" Then she understood and laughed. "You deliciously silly, Dicky. Sit down this moment, and let me hold the little mirror you keep in your desk for you, so you can brush your hair."

"Bother my hair."

"Dicky, how abysmally, ridiculously absurd you can be. Don't you know you are the only person who exists for me in the wide world?"

"Doesn't seem like it," Richard growled.

"Dicky, you know you are my 'inexpressive he,' don't you?"

"The trouble is," he snapped, "I do not believe I am your 'he' at all."

"Richard, what do you mean now?"

He looked at her curiously.

"I wish," he said, "I could make plain to you what I mean. But you wouldn't understand. You're incapable, I think, of judging. A man to be perfect in your eyes would have to be a disembodied spirit."

Betty became very serious. She shrank away from Richard's desk where she had been standing.

"I thought we had agreed not to reopen that subject," she said.

"But if you think that Archie Telfer is a disembodied spirit——"

Betty stepped forward and placed her hand lightly on the young man's arm.

"Hush, Dicky," she said gravely, "aren't you allowing a fit of unjustifiable jealousy to carry you too far?"

The touch of her cool, sweet fingers sent a thrill through him.

"Look here, Betty," he said roughly, "let's continue this 'in our next.' I have work to do. And I imagine you have, too."

"What a perfectly charming mood you are in, Richard."

Betty went to the door, then turned once more to look at him. She hoped that he would call her back. She was temperamentally incapable of harboring anger for any length of time against any one whom she loved, and it hurt her to think of leaving him in this frame of mind. But he, writing with feverish haste, paid no attention to her. She marveled at his concentration, and it hurt her to think he could go back to his work so quickly and thoroughly after they had exchanged hasty words. Slowly she walked back to him and stood at the side of his desk without speaking. Without intention on her part, her eyes happened to fall on the

sheet of paper over which his pen was traveling so rapidly. He had not been writing at all,—he had merely been drawing his pen in crude scroll work across the paper with the evident intention of giving her the impression that he was writing. She fell back guiltily. She did not wish to humiliate him by letting him see that she had discovered his pretense. And yet, intensely sorry as she felt for him, because of her non-comprehension of the nature of his passion, she had not the remotest notion of what he was suffering.

"Are you still here, Betty?"

She noticed the deep blue circles under his eyes as he looked up at her. He spoke roughly. Whole-heartedly he wished her out of the room, and yet he knew that the moment she was gone he would wish her back. His nerves were playing him strange tricks these days.

Regarding him earnestly, she remembered that he had complained of sleeping poorly.

"Dicky," she said tenderly, "you know you have promised me quite a number of times to go and consult a doctor about your insomnia. Won't you go to-night—before you come home?"

Her gentleness was balm to his quivering nerves. All his resentment, the dull, smoldering rancor which he was cherishing against her because she had talked and laughed with Archie Telfer left him. He was ashamed of his churlishness and lack of self-control.

"Very well, Betty," he said quietly. "I'll go to-night."

She went from the room at last, and burying his face in his hands, he abandoned himself for a few moments to the sweep of his feelings.

## CHAPTER IX

Richard had never had occasion to consult a physician, and he was forced to ask the cashier, a blond, stout German-American by the name of Hoffman, for advice, and with the name and address of a reputable practitioner in his pocketbook, he left the office at five o'clock. It was almost a relief for him to leave the office without Betty. At the outset of his courtship he had desired her society incessantly, but of late the close propinquity in which their lives were cast was becoming intolerably irksome to him.

The physician whom he consulted was a business-like man of about forty.

"Since when have you been sleeping poorly?"

"About seven weeks—two months—something like that."

"Ever suffer from insomnia before?"

"Never."

"You wear no glasses, I notice. Sometimes insomnia is due to a slight astigmatism. Any headaches, biliousness, nausea?"

"No," said Richard, "I simply cannot sleep, that is all."

Doctor Moran began to ask more intimate questions. He tested Richard's heart and lungs. Finally he concluded:

"You're as sound as a nut. A little nervous, that's all. I'll give you a sleeping powder, which you can take whenever you need it."

He scribbled the prescription upon his pad, handed the slip of paper to Richard, and escorted him to the door. The door was already half-open, when he said:

"By the way, you look like a prosperous young man."

Richard smiled.

"Fairly prosperous."

"Well, doctors sometimes ask questions that seem impertinent but are merely pertinent. Are you prosperous enough to get married?"

"Why, yes."

"Perhaps you are engaged?"

"I am."

Doctor Moran opened the door all the way. The maid who sat in the hall rose and went to summon the next patient. The physician laid his hand upon Richard's shoulder with professional familiarity.

"My advice to you, Mr. Pryce," he said, "is to marry. Marry as soon as you can and your nervousness and insomnia will disappear. Good-evening."

Richard was furious. He wanted to retort angrily, but the maid was already appearing with the next patient. Patient and physician disappeared into the doctor's office. The maid held open the street door for Richard, and he found himself out on the stoop.

For an hour, fury at high tide, he tramped the streets. He himself, sparingly, it is true, had allowed himself to think with longing of the time when Betty would be his wife. But Dr. Moran, it seemed to him, had offered Betty, without knowing her, the last insult in recommending her to him as a sort of pleasant medicine, a panacea for insomnia! He was furious with himself for having been so stupid as not to divine the cause of his insomnia. Last of all, he was furious with Betty for being what she was—so unsensual and devoid of passion that to a decent-minded man marriage to her

became impossible unless by some wizardry to which Richard did not hold the key he could transform her into a normal, natural, flesh-and-blood woman.

Finally his wrath abated. He telephoned home to Mrs. Presbey not to wait dinner for him; then he went to a drug-store, and drank a cup of tomato bouillon and ate a chicken sandwich at the soda-water fountain.

After that he went for another walk along the brilliantly lighted Great White Way.

It occurred to him that he might marry Betty, without entering into his conjugal rights, trusting to the intimate propinquity that necessarily exists between two people living side by side in the same room day and night to bring to the surface Betty's latent womanhood. But he feared to put his plan into execution, because he did not trust himself. He acutely remembered the night which he had spent in her room attending her sprained ankle and he feared that, once she was his wife and the specter of degrading her to the plane of vulgar immorality be removed as a deterrent, he would be unable to carry out his high resolution.

He did not realize that what Archie Telfer had hinted at was true; that the eyes can be made a vehicle of appeal, the hands a vehicle of eloquence as well as the mouth, and that a kiss can be made an instrument of almost illimitable allure and intimacy.

He became contemplative. He, a man, who passionately desired the woman he loved, was offended by the purely natural view of marriage taken by the physician. How keenly, then, must Betty have suffered from his insistence. Betty, who was so deficient in womanhood that the very word "passion" was offensive to her. It seemed to him now that if the natural view of marriage was a corrective needed for Betty's point of view, the romantic view was a corrective needed more urgently

for his own viewpoint. He accused himself of having been blatantly raw and brutal with her. He realized poignantly that the natural ardor of the lover must have appeared to her as grossness. He vowed that in the future, no matter what suffering he might thereby entail upon himself, he would in no way give her offense.

And as if it were true indeed that virtue is its own reward, the unrest and misery which had filled him the last month passed from him. He went home at last, rejoicing in his chastened frame of mind.

## CHAPTER X

Mr. Telfer's private office was situated at the back of the store, and between it and the salesrooms was a small anteroom for visitors who were kept waiting any length of time. Part of Betty's duties were to keep this room in order, to see that magazines and periodicals were taken away and new reading matter left on the files and tables. The door of this room had been clumsily devised. The iron staircase, enclosing spiral stairs and leading to the gallery, abutted almost immediately on the threshold of the door, so that only a triangular passage was left for egress or entrance. The iron staircase, which continued along the gallery for several yards, making one end of it contiguous to the stairs, when the door was left ajar, acted as a sort of speaking tube, and every word spoken in the anteroom could be plainly heard on the gallery in consequence, and vice versa.

Betty, arranging magazines in the anteroom, eavesdropped unwillingly more than once, for Miss Connors and Miss Sharpe jabbered incessantly, and the conversations she overheard contributed to the dislike which she felt for the two girls. It was a dislike which they reciprocated with compound interest. Miss Sharpe, whose would-be polished exterior was misleading, Betty had at first honestly tried to like. She felt there was no reason why she should not be at least friendly with a young lady who expressed such admirable sentiments as did Miss Sharpe upon every possible and impossible occasion.

One evening when Betty and Miss Sharpe left the

store together, Betty warmed perceptibly toward Miss Sharpe, who had been discoursing beautifully upon music. Betty did not guess that part of the insert programs published by the Philharmonic Society, and known and valued by every New York concert goer, had been memorized for her especial benefit. She discovered the fact about a week later in looking through some old programs of Richard's, and from that day on she felt justified in nourishing her distrust and dislike of Miss Sharpe.

One morning in December the following conversation was wafted down to Betty, who was sorting new magazines from old, in the anteroom:

Miss Sharpe: "Oh, my, what a book, Mamie; how can you bear to waste your time on such unliterary gush?"

Miss Connors: "Oh, go chase yourself, Rachel. Gush, is it? If you ever fall in love, you'll be more of a gazaboo than the girl in the book."

Miss Sharpe: "I say, Mamie, show the book to Prudy and see what she says."

Miss Connors: "I will not. Prudy ain't half as weak-minded as you'd like to make her out to be. 'Tain't her fault, poor thing, that her Fifth Avenue manners are genueye-an, while yours are eckquired."

Miss Sharpe: "What a cantankerous shrew you are, Mamie."

Miss Connors: "Talk United States, will you? Your grouch against Prudy ain't nothing but jealousy, anyhow. She didn't have to go floppin' herself all over Richard the Innocent's desk—like some other folks I know, to get him to make the goo-goos at her. Poor other folks!"

Miss Sharpe: "I really do not know whom you mean by 'other folks.'"

Miss Connors: "Don't, eh?"

Miss Sharpe: "If you mean me—I never wasted time on him. Richard the Innocent is such a pill that a girl could clasp his hand to her heart without interesting him."

Miss Connors: "Did you make as desprit an effort as all that, Miss Schapirowitz?"

Miss Sharpe: "Miss Connors, you're insulting. My name is Sharpe."

Miss Connors: "Insulting, am I? That's what one of my gentleman friends said to me the other day, when I called him down."

Miss Sharpe: "I suppose he objected to your having more than one 'gentleman friend.'"

Miss Connors: "My opinion is that girls who approve of only one gentleman friend were never troubled by more than one at a time."

Miss Sharpe: "Certainly I wouldn't like to have friends who were troublesome."

Miss Connors: "Oh, I know how to take care of myself—believe me. I believe as a man has got certain liberties while he is courting a girl, but——"

There followed a list of prohibited liberties graphically described in detail.

Betty clenched her little white hands and ran up to the gallery.

"Girls," she said, "you must not speak of improper things in office hours. I have spoken of this before."

Betty was surprised at the authoritative ring of her own voice and at her courage in speaking thus to the two girls, both of whom were considerably older than herself. She expected an outbreak of some kind, but they, recognizing her authority, did not answer. Suddenly, however, Miss Sharpe began a disjointed conver-

sation on this plan, in which Miss Connors' retorts ably seconded her.

"Mamie, dear, hand me the mucilage, will you?" "Certainly, dear." "Thank you, dear." "Don't mention it, dear." "Rachel, I think I left my pen on your desk." "Oh, yes, Mamie, here it is. Do you want it?" "Yes, will you hand it to me?" "Of course, don't move." "Thank you." "Don't mention it."

The coming of Betty, the common enemy, had cemented the lacerated friendship.

Betty was on the verge of tears. The means her two subordinates chose for venting their resentment against their superior was so insidious that no one could have analyzed wherein the offense lay. It was so subtly managed. Betty was thankful when the buzzer summoned her to Mr. Telfer's room.

As she entered the anteroom she saw Archie Telfer lounging in one of the wicker easy chairs in his best Lord Chumley manner. He sprang to his feet, bowing elaborately as she crossed the room to the door leading to Mr. Telfer's private office. To Betty's surprise, Mr. Telfer was not there.

"Did your father go out?" she inquired, in surprise.

"My father? He hasn't been down this morning, I am told."

"I think he rang for me."

Archie Telfer gave her a dazzling smile.

"I had the impudence to ring for you," he said.

"The buzzer is there for the purpose of summoning me when I am wanted," Betty retorted coldly. "What can I do for you?"

"Converse with me." He offered her a chair with a grandiloquent flourish of the hand.

"Conversing with Mr. Telfer's callers is hardly one of my duties." She turned to go.

"Don't go, Miss Garside, or I shall think that Richard has been telling you what a sad, bad man I am."

"Really, I am not aware, Mr. Telfer, that Richard and I ever discussed you at all."

"Wow, wow, now will I be good. Come, come, Miss Garside, that's cruel. Why break a butterfly on the wheel? Why, I say?"

"I shouldn't think that a great big man would care to describe himself as a butterfly."

"Why not? There are masculine as well as feminine butterflies. Otherwise the species would die out, Lady of the Glacial Temperament."

Betty looked at him helplessly. He continued rapidly, circling around the room as gracefully as if he were indeed the insect to which he had likened himself.

"You know, really, there was no occasion for landing on me with both feet as you did." He came to a stop at the door, and stood leaning up against it, right elbow resting upon cupped left hand, fingers of the right hand gently fondling his chin. At the moment some one tried to open the door from without. Archie felt the impact of the shock and moved from the door. But no one entered. Betty had not even noticed the incident.

Archie continued:

"That pretty little head of yours has been thinking all sorts of horrid things about me. Poor me! Because of the three graces who have entered the arena for my hand, I have been so considerate of you and your reputation that I have not even asked you to lunch with me."

"If you had asked me, I wouldn't have accepted the invitation," Betty said bluntly.

"Well, although two is company and three is a crowd, some day, with Grandmamma Pryce to chaperone us,

you and I will go on a marvelous, matchless, murderous, murmurous, midday spree."

"If we three were to lunch together, Dick wouldn't be the crowd."

"Slap-dash—bing-bang—what a straight shot you are, Miss Absolute Zero. I never met a girl of the Ice Age before, Miss Garside. You'd make an excellent companion, I imagine, on a sweltering July day!"

Betty could not keep from laughing. It was impossible to be angry with Archie Telfer for any length of time. She always had the sensation, when speaking with him of participating in some scene in a play on the stage.

"How silly men can be," she said; "great grown-up men who ought to know better."

"And that to the Adonis of the Stage!" He struck a languishing attitude, but Betty, paying no further heed, left the room.

Out of the room, her smile died away. She had laughed at Archie Telfer's nonsense, and yet, absurdly enough, although there had been nothing disrespectful in his manner, and his words had not been offensive, she felt subtly annoyed. She resolved to see as little as possible of Archie in the future.

Passing Richard's door, she hesitated a moment. There was nothing to tell him in particular, but the strange desire to be near him, to hear his voice, to see him, came over her, as it always did when she knew that he was near. Vaguely, at times, this feeling had troubled her, because she suspected that it might be the beginning of the madness from which all men and women, herself excepted, seemed to suffer. But to-day she gave it no thought.

"Dick," she said at the open door, "the mail orders were very light—a little over ten dollars."

"Thank you."

She stepped out and allowed the door to swing to behind her.

"Betty!"

She caught the swing-door, flung it back, and asked: "Yes?"

Richard looked at her fixedly for a moment, and then said very gently:

"Nothing."

Disappointed because he had nothing to say to her, because he gave her no excuse for lingering in his room for a moment, she closed the door and went back to her work.

Archie Telfer, finding himself alone, strode with Beau Brummelian air into Richard's office.

"I'm not disturbing you, my boy, am I?"

"Frankly, you are."

"What's the matter, Pryce?"

Richard wheeled around savagely in his swivel-chair.

"Look here," he said hoarsely, "how did you dare to lock the door after ringing for Miss Garside?"

Archie whistled. "Well," he said, "it takes a man with a clean bill of health like yourself to think ill of a girl like Miss Garside."

Richard snorted. "It's not Miss Garside I am thinking ill of."

"You're a brute, Pryce. I was leaning up against the door by chance—I vow it was chance—and I moved away instantly when I felt someone try the door."

"Oh, very well," said Richard surlily.

"Do you know," Archie said amiably, "you are as sour-tempered lately as an old maid or a disappointed widow. I'd like to prescribe for you, Pryce. If the Lady of the Glacial Temperament chills your too ardent soul and gives your heart chilblains—why, allow me

to suggest to you that there are other pretty faces in the world."

"Mind your own business, will you?"

"Pryce, you're a blithering idiot. What's the use of being a Puritan?"

"If you don't keep still, I'll throw you out."

"Nice, gentle, amiable, courteous way you have of treating your employer's son. However, I bear you no ill-will. I'd like to drug you, Dicky Pryce, and transport you into a harem filled with houris whose beauty and witching loveliness would make Semiramis and Cleopatra and the Queen of Sheba look like so many counterfeit nickels."

"You——"

"Hush! Don't call me a cur again." Archie was laughing good-humoredly. "Perhaps you are right, after all. Perhaps your divinity is worth the sacrifices you are making for her, my Joseph. Oh, oh, for the might, a soul so white, to lead from the path that is narrow and right—for sure she's a dream, not a vaudeville scream—but a moonbeam, a sunbeam, a bowl of *ice*-cream. In the bargain, she's a peach—alas, beyond reach—some things to teach her—the admirable creature —I would risk my neck—I sure would, by Heck—— Ah, Richard Pryce, Dicky Pryce, how can I go on with my poetastering when your face is set to so sinister a pattern? Ta-ta, son—deviate not from the narrow path, desert it not for the primrose path of dalliance. Ta-ta, I hear the melodious voice of the author of my being."

Telfer senior had just entered with another gentleman who was quite as fat and portly and puffy-looking as himself. Betty, seeing them pass, remembered Archie's description of Direktor Markheim and his father, and had no difficulty in guessing that the plebeian-look-

ing companion of the elder Telfer was the famous impresario of the opera, Direktor Markheim. The great man chose to retain the German title given to theatrical and operatic managers, a fact which escaped ridicule in a company composed almost exclusively of foreign stars and having only a very small native-born contingent.

Betty went on faithfully with her work. After a half-hour or so, Mr. Telfer suddenly appeared at her side with the Direktor.

"Miss Garside," he said, "I want you to meet Direktor Markheim."

Betty was about to rise, but the great man wagged his fat head, and said:

"Sit still, my child. I have a little music here which I would like you to sing for me."

Betty grew red with fright.

"I do not sing," she said.

Mr. Telfer waved his big hand.

"Mr. Pryce tells us you do, enough for this. Therefore, if you please."

Betty gave her employer an agonized look, but he nodded encouragingly.

"Oh, Markheim knows you are not a Mary Garden or an Emma Eames. Just to oblige him, you know."

The ground being cut from under her feet, her heart beating like a trip-hammer, Betty essayed the unwelcome task. The music was a little German song by Schumann on which Richard had drilled her, a coincidence which she would have found astonishing had she not been too confused to give the matter a thought. The episode had arranged itself so quickly that, in spite of her momentary fright, she had no time to give way to nervousness. She was singing the music before she realized that she was actually in the thick of an adventure.

When she finished the fat little Direktor, his eyes

squinting like the eyes of a Japanese from beneath heavy rolls of fat, said:

"Sehr gut—*sehr gut.*"

"It will do?" Mr. Telfer asked eagerly.

"I should say so."

Mr. Telfer turned to Betty.

"Thank you, Miss Garside. Will you please go to Mr. Pryce and tell him I said it would do."

Poor Betty, dazed and perplexed, asked:

"*What* will do?"

"Just say '*It* will do.' He will understand." Mr. Telfer nodded his head kindly at Betty. He was a big-hearted, whole-souled man, and had shown Betty many kindnesses since she had entered his employ. Looking at him, Betty had often wondered how father and son could be so utterly dissimilar. Betty rose to go, when Direktor Markheim said:

"You are fond of going to the Metropolitan Opera House, *hein?*"

"I have never been inside the Metropolitan," said Betty.

"*Unglaublich!* And you have lived in New York for a long time? Telfer, *can* such things be?"

Mr. Telfer laughed.

"You can remedy that quickly enough," he said.

"*Herrje,* so I can. Wait, my child. One moment."

And the fat Direktor drew a fat wallet from his pocket. He was so fat that Betty wondered whether his arms would not break out of their sockets under the strain of passing his arms way around his body to get at his vest pocket. But no mishap of the sort occurred, and presently Betty found herself with a flimsy bit of paper in her hand, to which he had signed his initials, and which, he informed her, entitled her to two

seats at the opera for any evening it would please her to select.

Betty thanked him, and then went on her errand to Richard's room. She found him tipped back in his swivel chair, his hair standing out at all angles. He sprang to his feet as she entered.

"Well?" he demanded feverishly.

"Mr. Telfer says it will do."

"Ah, I knew it!" Richard sprang from the chair and called an office boy. "I don't want to be disturbed," he said. He came back to Betty. "Betty, I want a long talk with you."

He sat down upon his chair and rested his arm upon the desk. A curious feeling of being remote from him swept over Betty. He did not seem like *her* Richard, her Dicky, who was always so conscious of her presence, so eager to do for her, so completely wrapped up in her. What had happened?

"Betty, I did something without consulting you which may make you a little angry with me. To begin with, the Musical Progress League has been getting together a fund to be used for European scholarships, and the judges in the award of the three years' scholarships are Mr. Telfer, Direktor Markheim and Stanley Earlcote."

"The Man of Mystery?"

"The same. Now, Mr. Telfer, although he is the owner of the largest music publishing house in America, knows nothing of music, and depends upon Markheim, and Markheim, although he is the manager of the greatest opera company in the world, is very diffident as a critic, and in turn depends upon Stanley Earlcote. You know that a good deal of curiosity has been aroused as to the reason of Earlcote's return to America. Some folks do not believe he is disabled at all, and think that

the story of the catastrophe which befell him is a huge press agent's hoax."

"But is it?"

"No, it is not. The real reason of his return is that he is to help Markheim whenever Markheim needs him in coming to a decision upon any question of vocal and instrumental musicianship. This, at least, is one of the real reasons of his return. Of course, the salary of six thousand a year which the opera company pays him for acting as advisory counsel, in view of his enormous wealth, in no way helped influence him to accept this post."

"What then——?" Betty's cheeks were glowing with excitement. This was life, romance, such as one read of in books; mysterious motives, intrigues! Oh, this was life, indeed!

"I do not know, I do not care," Richard replied. "Perhaps he is glad of some active interest in musical matters. At any rate, the Musical Progress League has not enough money this year to send more than one artist abroad, although they hope, within three or four years, to get enough money together to finance four or five different artists. So, for the present, the violinist, the pianist, or the singer of greatest promise will get the three years' scholarship. And that is where you come in."

"I? What do you mean?" stammered Betty.

"I mean, dear, that I have taken the great liberty of entering your name as an applicant for the vocal scholarship."

"Dicky, how could you? My poor little voice? And, besides, I have no ambition at all. I would hate a public career."

"You think you have no ambition; you think a public career as singer would be distasteful to you, but you

do not know and cannot know just what your sentiments in the matter are until you know whether or not your voice is worth cultivating. I spoke to Mr. Telfer, told him how diffident you are, and he devised the plan of getting you to sing for Direktor Markheim without your knowing what it was all about."

"But if Markheim is no judge?"

"Oh, judge enough to know whether a voice is worth something or nothing."

"When does the contest come off?"

"Ten days hence, December fifteenth, at the Markheim residence. And now tell me, dear, that you are not angry with me."

"Nothing that you could do, Dicky, could make me angry with you. But couldn't I crawl out of it—the contest, I mean?"

"If you 'crawl out of it,' as you call it, you will stultify me. You wouldn't want to do that, would you?"

"Certainly not. But Dicky, even if that dreadful Earlcote says that my voice is worth cultivating, I am going to refuse to go to Europe unless——"

"Unless what, Betty?"

"Unless you get the scholarship, dear, and take me with you as your wife."

Richard looked very grave.

"We will decide nothing just now," he said.

"Dicky, I know my own mind. I know there is one thing I want in the world—your love and yourself, dear, and nothing could outweigh the joy of being your wife, the right to care for you, to do for you. I would not forego that joy, not if I were to be a second Melba or Patti. I think, Dick, a woman's love precludes all other aspirations for herself."

"Yes, dear, a woman's love—but that, darling, according to your own statements, is not the feeling you

have for me. Don't interrupt me, dear. I am not going to offend you. I shall be very delicate in my choice of words. I feel, dear, as I told you before, that you may have made a mistake in promising yourself to me. I hope not. But I do not know. I am unable to wake the responsive feeling in you, and that may mean that you do not love me after all."

"Dicky," Betty asked impetuously, "this isn't jealousy of Archie Telfer, is it?"

"No, Betty. I was afraid at one time that he would insinuate himself into your good graces. But I think you have taken the measure of that hound."

"Why do you always call him hard names, Dick? He has never deserved them through his manner to me."

"Well, that's what he is, nevertheless. Don't ask questions, Betty, but continue to give him a wide berth. He's incredibly low."

Betty sat quite still for a moment. Then she asked:

"Dicky, you don't really think I could ever care for anyone but you? You know you are on a pedestal in my heart, and that feeling, dear, I will never have for anyone else."

"Betty, I want to be fair with you. I have to be fair. I love you more intensely than you can imagine, for I love you in just the same way as you love me, and I have an additional love for you as well. It would be terribly hard to lose you, but there is one thing which it would be harder still to bear. I could not endure thinking that I had cheated you of your chance—your chance of happiness, your chance of life, your chance of love, your chance of knowing what the deeper feeling, the subtler tie can mean to a woman. I cannot take the risk of defrauding you of that. At first my passion for you seemed to turn to a virulent poison when I realized that you did not care for me in that way. But now I have

the desire to deal fairly with you under all circumstances and conditions, and I would even have the strength to renounce you if it were for your best."

"Dicky," she said, a little awed by the exaltation with which he had spoken. "I did not know you cared for me as much as all that. Dicky, let me withdraw from this Contest!" The sweet face was clouded with misery. "Dearest, it occurs to me only now that if I should by any chance receive the award, you would be barred. Let me withdraw now, since my mind is firmly made up to refuse the scholarship should it come my way."

"No, dear, I insist, and, moreover, I want you to promise me faithfully that if you receive the award, you will not step aside on my account. If you feel, then, that cultivation of your voice will bring you happiness, I want you to promise me that you will not hesitate to accept."

"I can safely promise that," Betty said, laughing. "You are forcing me to play a farce because you have Quixotic notions. So be it. It is very sweet to know, my dearest Dicky darling, that you love me so unselfishly. I had a notion, dear, that because of the other feeling, your love could not be unselfish. But now I see I am wrong. I believe, Dicky, that you love me more unselfishly than I love you. You have longed and hoped and prayed for a chance to go to Europe all your life, and now you are willing to minimize your chances of Europe because you want to treat me honestly. You would renounce me, even, if it were necessary to secure my happiness. I am not as good as that. I cannot imagine any circumstance arising which would make me willing to give you up. Perhaps another woman could give you more than I can give—could give you the deeper feeling, the stronger love of which you speak so much. But I would not be willing to renounce you on that account. What I am giving you is my all, my everything—

gold of my heart, the very marrow and pith of my inward self, and the voice of the heart tells me that you are meant for me, and I for you. I cannot express just what I feel for you, Dicky. You entered my life at a time when everything seemed black and grim, when I was all alone, and even before you came I knew you would come. You were my staff, my friend, my counselor. Did I say you entered my life? You filled it, you absorbed it into your own, and you cannot filter it away again."

Very reverently he took her hands and kissed them.

"Please God," he said, "the deeper feeling may still come."

## CHAPTER XI

Because they were both very nervous concerning the formidable event which was to transpire on December fifteenth, Betty wholly on Richard's account, Richard principally as to the general effect upon his life, they very sensibly decided not to sit at home nursing their anxiety, but relieved their worry by judicious relaxation, judicious relaxation for them meaning music, of course. Betty loved music, and Richard had taught her how to listen intelligently. Once in the concert hall, she surrendered herself completely to the magic of the melodies, the witchery of the myriad throated orchestra. She lost the sensation of time, space and self. Her soul seemed to become a disembodied thing that hovered somewhere between orchestra and singers, merging itself now with the one, now with the other, self-forgetful, self-unconscious, existing in a trance of undreamed-of delight.

But it was the opera "Tannhæuser," which they heard on the pass provided by the Direktor, which was destined to wholly subjugate Betty's imagination, to satisfy her completely, to enter into and dominate her life, to become part of herself. She had glanced over the score, she had read the libretto before she took her seat in the darkened auditorium; but the words had meant nothing to her, and the score had left her imagination untouched and cold. Yet so sensitive was she to the message conveyed by individual musical phrases that she responded perfectly to the delicate shadings of the score, interpreting them to herself with unflinching insight, with a wealth of understanding that made the mystic sig-

nificance of the opera stand out allegorically and with the neatly limned precision of a flute player of Arcady or a Wedgwood vase with its "silent melodies."

In the prelude was mirrored the Titanic struggle that was to ensue. The motif of the enchantress of the Venusberg and the motif of the pilgrims came into clashing contrast at the very outset, and shadowed forth the revolt against sanctity, the rebellion against sensuality, the subjugation by purity, the submission to evil, the entire strange flux of chaste thinking and sinful living. They shadowed forth all this, and hinted vaguely at the ultimate goal, the final spiritual ravishment, the love of a pure woman and her strength to conquer the manifold enemies that beset her lover, the glamour of forbidden things, his own frailty, the lurid memories of dead sins, the terrors of the imagination lashed into life by a superstitious-ridden, soul-greedy church.

These two motifs clashed, conflicted, persisted side by side. They warred with each other, they stormed at each other, clamorously proclaimed their detestation of each other. Now one was in the ascendant, now the other. But though in the ascendant for the moment, neither was triumphant, neither was jubilant with the sense of ultimate and permanent victory. The other motif glided stealthily beneath it, interlaced it, punctured it, encroached upon it, and though no more distinct at times than a shadow at noon, the shadow grew and miraculously gained in strength until it forced into the background its enemy. Now the conditions were reversed, and the erstwhile ascendant motif bided its time, watched its opportunity to break through the phalanx of the musical armor arrayed against it; broke through it at last and reversed the conditions once more. And thus continued the interminable truceless, ceaseless struggle, that has subsisted since time imme-

morial, whose birth was contemporaneous with the birth of the world and which will continue to exist so long as gold glitters, fire burns or flesh tempts flesh and blood can leap in loathing and pulse in ecstasy.

The motif of the Venusberg was full of the promise of soft pleasure. It was eloquent of the enchantment of secret and forbidden rites. It wooed, cooed, danced trippingly. It was gracious, full of allure, brimful of ease. It was redolent of soft cushions, softer limbs and lips whose touch was softer than rose petals or velvet or honey. Its onrush was like a silver gale whistling through a shower of golden rain, like the rustling of gem-laden skirts of a myriad of damosels fallen from grace. But its wooing became monotonous, the witchery of the whirlpool of sound in which it moved, sweeping all resistance before it, lost its note of ecstasy, leaving behind it a vision of contorted limbs. Its convolutions were no longer agreeable; the air seemed filled with writhing, wriggling, suffering, inutterable weary things; its monotony held a menace; it told of the deadly sameness of vice, it proclaimed that pleasure alone can never suffice, that nothing can beget such disgust and fatigue and loathing as an endless round of sterile pleasure. The magic of the swishing cauldron of music in which the confused images had floated with such gossamer, tempting, fairylike insistence but a brief period before, now seemed oddly like the hissing of the sulphurous fumes escaping from some purgatorial cavern enriched by the moaning of innumerable wretches held in that ante-chamber of hell.

Now the motif of the pilgrims tittilated through the uneasy harmonies, elusively, ravishly, like the sane elusive sweetness conveyed by the fragrance of the budding vine, evoking pure dreams of mystic enchantment. The motif of the pilgrims shone through the motif of

the Venusberg like a face through a veil, and as the features of a face assume shape and outline when the veil is drawn taut, so the outlines of the pilgrim motif became sharply limned, lucid and distinct beneath the disturbing phantasms of those shrilly insistent melodies; the face pierced the veil, broke its frail threads, emerged, and the crepuscular, vitiating beauty of the Venusberg receded into the background, completely submerged by the gloomy beauty of the pilgrims' chorus. Like a rich old tapestry, hidden in the cavernous depths of some monastery for centuries, its colors mellowed by age, but by no means faded since it had been kept away from the vulgar daylight, the melody of the pilgrims' chorus unrolled itself, breathing the mysterious witchery of imperishable things, exuding an aroma of mystic sanctity. About it there was no note of vulgar jubilation. The dignity in which it was swathed was so lofty that it barely stooped to recognize its enemies, secure in the knowledge that no mundane citadel can hold out against its unearthly and ghostly preëminence. It did not sweep all before it by brilliant onslaught; it absorbed, gently pushed aside, utterly dissipated the melody that had opposed it. It strove upward and ever up; but it did not dash upward in a violent rush; gently, firmly, irrevocably, moving step by step, receding as often as it advanced, yet ever advancing a little more than it had receded, it moved on, until it attained its highest point, where the immensity of sound hung suspended for a moment as if pinned to a star, as if imbedded in a cloud, as if punctuating the apex of the upward striving lattice work of a Gothic window, and like a Gothic design forming an incomprehensible symbol of the pure desires of the spirit.

Beside the austere beauty of the pilgrims' chorus the filigree lace work of the Venusberg motif seemed a

sorry and pitiful thing; in retrospection its filminess appeared flimsy, its titillations puerile, its allure trivial; and yet, when it reappeared, the brief lapse into virtue had refreshed the jaded senses like a cold bath, and its sensuous charm, its superheated fancifulness, its whirling, sweeping diablerie lashed and maddened and delighted the nerves as before, whipped and goaded and tortured them with ever increasing vigor as the curtain rose on the first scene, disclosing the enchantress on her couch of pleasure in the Venusberg.

Never were arms so white, bosom so pearly and inviting, handmaidens so frothily agile. They danced, hurled themselves hither and thither, human will-o'-the-wisps, seemingly mere visible emanations from the seething tempest of sound that boiled all about. Presently, they began to pall, their agility bored where it had erstwhile delighted, their amazing genuflections seemed senseless and insipid. Life seemed a hopeless and barren thing in such an atmosphere of tempestuous motion. Tannhæuser's desire to leave this cavern of pleasure and lust became understandable. Was he merely sated or truly repentant? Perhaps he himself did not know.

His escape could not be easily compassed. The turmoil subsided, the will-o-the-wisp handmaidens disappeared. Venus herself put forth her every endeavor to hold her lover.

Never were arms so white, hands so caressing, fingers so eloquent. Those arms, those hands, those fingers seemed living entities. They added their individual entreaties to the wooing of the ravishing music that lulled the senses like a bath of some perfumed anodyne. The undulations of those white arms, the movements of those snowy hands, the gestures of those rosy fingers were each a melody or a poem that superimposed their beauty upon the harmonic beauties that were being

lavished in such spendthrift fashion by the orchestra. And this beauty that was being squandered for his delectation vindicated Tannhæuser. It was not in the nature of man born of woman to be sated by this; the appeal of Venus was too near-human, too near-divine, too entirely superb. He was repentant, not sated, and because a spiritual necessity and not a jaded appetite craving plainer fare had driven him to his resolve to leave the Venusberg, he remained true to his resolve. No caress, no promise of future embraces, no anticipation of unceasing ecstasies could lure him from that resolve.

Never were arms so eloquent, hands so white, fingers so caressing. But the black magic of the flesh lost its potency when it opposed itself with such temerity to the white magic of the spirit. At last, humiliated and infuriated by her failure to forge new chains upon her lover, Venus's promises were turned into threats, her wooing was transformed to a menace, her white arms were no longer sentinels that invited to a haven of rest and delight but serpents that writhed and twisted in impotent rage; her fingers moved and laced and twitched like ribbons of flame with power to burn and consume and poison. And from all that Tannhæuser effected his escape.

Almost the first sight that met his eyes on emerging into the sane, healthy world of commonplace things was a band of aged pilgrims, setting forth on a pilgrimage to Rome. Those gnarled and bent figures, some of whom must inevitably fall by the wayside before reaching the Holy City, appeared to him a good omen. The wondrous melody of the pilgrim's chorus was now heard for the first time in unimpeded beauty, unhampered by the disturbing suggestiveness and concupiscence of the melodies of the Venusberg. The entire orchestra engaged in sing-

ing it. It was unfurled like a sacred banner, like some holy flag pointing the way to a bloodless, spiritual victory.

Tannhæuser now met his old friends, the Landgrave, Wolfram von Eschenbach and others, and they, magnanimous and beneficent souls, rejoiced on finding him. They had an old quarrel with him, but they cherished no rancor, no resentment. But they did not guess where and how he had spent his absent days. Had they known, they would have spurned Tannhæuser instead of welcoming him.

It was Wolfram von Eschenbach who acquainted Tannhæuser with the fact that Elisabeth, the Landgrave's daughter, loved him and has pined for him ever since he left his circle of friends. Stupendous magnanimity! For Wolfram loved her himself, and hoped that in the coming Singing Festival he would carry off the prize, and in winning the prize move Elisabeth sufficiently by his singing to win her in marriage.

What could Wolfram von Eschenbach offer Elisabeth? What the other suitors for her hand? Men of pure lives, of sanctified aspirations, the tenor of whose lives was undisturbed by unlawful thoughts, by unhallowed desires, they were bound to regard Elisabeth as a semi-angel, not as flesh and blood, as a reward, not as a helpmate. But Elisabeth was not a woman to be thus disposed of. Though worn as a crown, a crown in her eyes was a chattel and a chattel she would never consent to be. As the wife of Wolfram or any of the other lofty and serene souls that adored her as a semi-saint, she would have been a most highly cherished possession, a chief treasure. She would never have been her husband's peer, his equal. She would have been both higher and lower than himself, higher, because he would have seen in her a beatified creature, lower, because he would

have protected and spared her in every conceivable way. In no manner could such a man have fulfilled the crying need of her womanhood. She was not fascinated by Tannhæuser because he had sinned, for as yet she did not even know how deeply steeped he was in sin of the most sinister sort; but she divined that his spirit needed her spirit, his flesh her flesh to help him on his pilgrimage through life, and this need of his satisfied the primordial, eternal, unquenchable need of her womanhood, the desire to be incorporated in the closest of unions with the man of her choice, to satisfy his every need, to answer and respond to his every desire.

All this was to be made clear to Elisabeth herself only upon the day when the competing singers met in the great hall of the Wartburg. Her life, until that hour, had flowed in statuesque dignity, like a mighty stream, whose unruffled grace may appear majestic to some, sluggish to others. Nothing had disturbed the equanimity of her spirit, stimulated her imagination, or awakened the senses. Music, to these grave and faithful men was not a relaxation, not a stimulant, not a pleasure, but a deep and abiding joy, a sort of votive offering to the soul of the world. For they distrusted pleasure, they viewed it askance as being an impermanent, shifting, fleeting, earthy thing, but they coveted joy, which they conceived not as a superficial or surface emotion, but as state of the spirit, which, once it had been attained, can be maintained forever, a state so profound that it underlies every human experience; it neutralizes sorrow itself and converts even poignant grief, such as grief at the death of one whom we love, into a feeling of melancholy exaltation.

Wolfram von Eschenbach was the first to sing. His singing inevitably reflected his reverent personality. He conceived love to be a thing wholly of the spirit; he

knew naught of flesh tints; he was purity embodied. But that purity, that tranquillity, that serenity were bound to arouse Tannhæuser's ire, they awakened in him a thousand devils of recollection, myriad imps of defiance. In answering Wolfram, he forgot time and place, forgot Elisabeth's presence, and in a passionate outbreak of song committed the breach against decorum and good taste of extolling Venus and her charms.

Consternation fell upon all present. The Venusberg! To extol the love of Venus in the presence of Elisabeth! They rushed upon Tannhæuser with drawn swords, they would have killed him, but Elisabeth intervened. She besought the infuriated singers not to send Tannhæuser's soul to everlasting perdition by killing him unshriven.

After that enormous offense one hope only remained. Rome! To seek pardon in Rome!

Followed days and weeks and months of ceaseless agony of spirit for Elisabeth. She prayed almost incessantly during those weeks. She became thin and wan from loss of sleep and anxiety. Her entire life resolved itself into a prayer for Tannhæuser.

The Pilgrims returned from Rome. Tannhæuser was not among them, and Elisabeth, filled with cruel foreboding, threw herself upon her knees in passionate prayer. The prayer was destined to be her last. Ill, exhausted, broken-hearted, death claimed her while praying for the man she loved.

The irony of fate ordained that Tannhæuser should return almost immediately afterwards. Broken in health and in spirit, cursed by the Pontiff in Rome, despairing of his soul's salvation, he returned to his former haunts, a mere phantom of his former self.

"Sooner shall the staff of dead wood in your hand break into bud than that your sins shall be remitted

you!" Plunged into an abyss of hopelessness by the cruel words of the Holy Father, Tannhæuser, ill, weary unto death, desiring merely a shelter, now determined to return to the Venusberg, the only abode that remained for him. Wolfram, filled with horror, argued with him. Venus appeared, stretching out her arms to Tannhæuser, and those arms, so eloquent, so white, so full of promise and allure with their pleading, entreating rosy fingers, seemed to draw him toward her, to magnetize him, to rob him of even the desire of salvation, just as the cruel words of the pontiff had robbed him of its hope. Again the witching music of the Venusberg was heard; modified, it was not so boisterously insinuating as before; it promised oblivion, a brief respite and rest before the sulphurous flames of hell claimed their own.

Just then the body of Elisabeth was carried by in solemn procession by the pilgrims. Wolfram von Eschenbach, staunch friend and loyal spirit, battled heroically with Tannhæuser. "One word, and you will still be saved. It is not too late," he cried, and Tannhæuser, overcome with grief on seeing Elisabeth's body, fell upon his knees. Filled with sudden detestation and abhorrence for Venus, he abandoned himself to his grief for Elisabeth, barely thinking of himself. "Pray for me, Elisabeth," he cried, but that cry did not voice fear for his soul's welfare but rather a sublime, self-forgetful repentance at having caused the death of her whose body was lying before him. That repentance, that self-forgetfulness, that abnegation wrought his salvation, because they compassed his redemption. Sin was cast out at last, its corroding poison overcome by a subtler, holier force.

Betty left the opera house in a state of stupefaction. The maze of faces, the enormous hordes of human beings

who had partaken of the same musical feast as herself and Dick, bewildered her. It occurred to her that the music had carried the same message to no two human beings, and she wondered whether Dick's interpretation vaguely resembled her own.

"Let us walk," she whispered as they reached the sidewalk at last. "Let us walk."

The night was clear and cold. The pavements were swept clean by a light, brisk north wind, and a gossamer moon looked down from a deep blue sky, its noble glory obscured by the glaring electric lights of the Great White Way.

"Dicky—what does Tannhæuser mean to you?"

"The continual struggle between good and evil—between Ormuzd and Ahriman, as the ancient Persians called it, making a god beneficent and a god malignant of the two forces. The same thought recurs in every religion, because the struggle between good and evil is one of the fundamental laws of life. The world cannot be wholly good or wholly bad."

"Why can the world not be wholly good?"

"I do not know. I have often wondered. The subject is one that eludes reason. One's thoughts seem to run around in a circle and arrive nowheres."

"But why? Have you no theory?"

"No, Betty, I have not."

"But, Dicky, can you imagine any man as fine-fibered as Tannhæuser being so horrid at the same time?"

"Oh, I suppose so. Some men are that way."

"Even if he loved another woman?"

Richard did not reply, and Betty repeated her question.

"I suppose Wagner wanted to visualize the continual temptation of the flesh. Your question is loosely framed, Betty."

"Well, you know what I mean."

"You mean, could any man loving a good woman find pleasure in being the lover of another, a wicked woman?"

"Yes," her voice was almost inaudible. "Can you understand *that*, Dick?"

"No, Betty, I cannot."

He felt the clasp of her fingers upon his arm tighten. Neither spoke again until they reached home.

## CHAPTER XII

The evening of December fifteenth arrived at last. As Betty was still in mourning, she wore a simple, girlishly made white gown, with black ribbons at her waist, but because her hair and her eyes were so black the ribbons sounded the note of mourning but ineffectually, and seemed rather the last refinement of *fin de siecle* chic than a badge of sorrow. Her pristine, virginal loveliness was thrown into high relief by this setting of black and white, and Dicky scrutinizing her intently at her own and Mrs. Presbey's request, the latter having helped dress her, felt a strange conglomeration of emotions sweep through him. Her purity was so apparent that it should have precluded passion. Nature should have allowed her the privilege of eternal virginity. But, owing to the brutal significance of life, eternal virginity meant a drab and meaningless middle age, meant unlovely and unloved spinsterhood. The only truly kind way, then, in which Nature could preserve temperaments such as Betty's from the contamination which life must inevitably bring, was to dole out death. But death, again, before fruition and fulfilment of love, meant the blighting of hope, the perpetuation of an unextinguishable fire, the agonies of purgatory for the man with whom death had so fraudulently dealt.

It was a rainy night, and they were thankful when at last they were safely ensconced in the taxicab, which Richard, fearing Betty might take cold in the thin summer gown, had ordered.

"Oh, Dicky, how heavenly this is. When we are rich,

dearest, we will take a taxicab ride every rainy night in the year."

"Why on rainy nights?"

"Because rainy nights are caused by the falling of tears of lovers who are in heaven, and we, dearest, will be selfishly happy and rejoice that we are still on earth, where tears are rare."

"Sweetheart!"

"Don't attempt to kiss me, Richard, because of the dress."

"If it were not for the dress . . . ?"

"I am as ready for kisses as you are, am I not, dearest? Who gave whom the first kiss, silly?"

"Betty, sweetheart, you are adorable."

"Oh, adorable—hear him!"

"Darling, you were never quite like this before—so playful, so wheedlingly entertaining."

"Am I usually so dull?"

"Sweetheart, you know what I mean. You do love me, don't you, Betty?"

"Um, um—possibly—a little."

"How much, Betty?"

"How can one measure love—or weigh it? Pound avoirdupois or troy?"

"Betty, Betty, you are driving me mad. One kiss, dearest!"

"If I gave you one kiss, Dick, you would wish two, and two would inevitably lead to four, and four, geometrical progression be thanked, to sixteen. And my dress, Dicky, my dress is to be considered."

Richard's brain reeled. Never before had she indulged in banter of this sort. Never before had the feminine in her held the upper hand so completely. Hope bounded sky-high. He had not believed her capable of such delicious love-banter; did it emanate from her heart or her

head, was it due to high animal spirits? He had never known her to possess anything vaguely resembling that usual concomitant of youth. Was she at last to discover that not only the spirit but the flesh as well must participate in love to give it well-rounded proportions? Then he rebuked himself for the second time that evening for indulging in such thoughts. He was determined to stifle his desire for her.

"Dicky!"

"Darling?"

"Dicky, when you are rich and famous, we will have everything we want for yourself and myself, too. Won't we? How heavenly it will be."

"Are there many things you want?"

"Loads."

"For instance?"

"A Cornelian cameo for your watch-fob."

"Oh, but that doesn't count. That is for me. What do *you* want?"

"And a scarf-pin—the one we saw in Maiden Lane the other day, with a pink pearl, do you remember? It was set in a crescent of small diamonds. Price three hundred and fifty dollars."

"But that is something for me again. Why not think of something for yourself?"

"Then I want a real Corot to hang over your piano right above a bust of Beethoven, and of course, instead of the plaster Beethoven we want a bust in marble, and, oh yes, a real Stradivarius to loan to anyone who wants to play a violin concerto with you."

"Betty, oh Betty, have you no wishes for yourself?"

"Yes, if it were not selfish, I'd rather we would remain poor so I could wash and scrub for you."

"As if I'd let you!"

"You'd never know the difference—you dear thing!

But, perhaps, after all, it would be better to be rich, because of course, if you weren't rich it would mean that you were not successful. Instead of being poor, you might be so nervous that you couldn't stand having a servant around you, and I could still do for you as if we were poor."

"You are certainly mapping out a great future for me—poverty or neurasthenia—thank you."

"Oh, you darling Dicky. I hope you will become a multi-millionaire—so you can have the pleasure of buying me everything I want."

"Yes, but what *do* you want?"

"Nothing, but I will invent a lot of fictitious wants for you to fill every day."

He pressed her hand and they fell silent.

The mansion of Direktor Markheim was brilliantly lighted, all too brilliantly, Betty thought, for so shabby an interior. Shabby the furniture seemed to her, and shabby the rugs and hangings. Betty, in her unsophistication in matters of art, had no idea that the shabby hangings were priceless old Bayeux tapestry, that the threadbare rugs were precious Kurdistan and Ghiordez and Shiraz rugs, and more valuable than the most gorgeously splendid contemporary rug to be found in any department store, and that the mangy-looking chairs were genuine Jacobean chairs, having as carefully authenticated a pedigree as any race horse.

Direktor Markheim's residence was in fact a museum rather than a home. Bronze Buddhas, from India; a Chinese Joss and rose-colored armor from old Nippon were jumbled together with Sevres vases on which drawing-room shepherds and shepherdesses danced minuets with freshly laundered lambs gamboling about in the background. The rooms, though spacious, were not large enough for the enormous throng of people as-

sembled in them. Betty and Richard were caught in a swaying mass, as closely packed as the Christmas crowds in a popular-priced department store.

They were pushing, or being pushed forward when a voice back of them remarked:

"The Herr Direktor likes to pack even his own private house, just to keep his hand in practise in packing the big house on Broadway." It was Archie Telfer. He looked aggressively handsome in evening clothes, and contrived to look cool and perfectly at ease in spite of the crush. As usual, his manner brought the color to her cheeks. She saw Richard's eyes harden as her color mounted, and in consequence anathematized Archie. He, nonchalantly paying no attention to Dick's frigid manner or her own diffidence, found what he described as "an Indian trail through this dense forest of imported civilization." Certainly it was the most cosmopolitan assemblage of men and women that Betty had ever found herself in, and willy-nilly, Richard notwithstanding, she was grateful to Archie for steering them away from the draughty entrance hall toward Frau Direktor Markheim, who was receiving, and then into a back parlor where there was much more vacant floor space.

"By the by," said Archie, having safely piloted them to a small alcove, "Richard, my son, the Herr Direktor is very anxious to see you as soon as you come, concerning the order in which the various contestants are to appear. You will find him and Mr. Earlcote at the head of the stairs."

Richard was furious because he must leave Betty in the society of the man he had every reason to distrust and dislike, but, mustering as much grace of manner and countenance as he could, he went his way.

"I am going to initiate you a bit," said Archie Telfer,

looking Betty over leisurely. "Not nervous, are you?" Her color had died away, and she had the sensation of being frightfully pale.

"A wee bit, perhaps," Betty replied. "Are many celebrities present?"

"Everybody present is a celebrity past, present or future," Archie retorted, laughing. "If you are nervous because of the celebrities, I think I can help you overcome your stage-fright. I'll introduce one or two to you. Do you see that man yonder, who looks as if he had used shoeblacking on his mustache?"

The description fitted the gentleman, whom Archie indicated by a glance, like the proverbial glove. Betty laughed.

"Who is he?"

"For one thing he is the champion beer drinker of the musical colony in New York. He has been known to consume fifty-five glasses of Pilsener—heavy imported beer, you know—at one sitting."

Betty looked incredulous.

"I am going to angle him for you, so you can examine him at your leisure. The Dutchmen are all alike, and the Italians are alike in a different way. One type drinks its beer and the other eats his spaghetti. At eleven o'clock a buffet luncheon is provided, in which the tastes of each nationality are catered to, for the Herr Direktor, when he has his 'evenings' does not treat his guests like the stork and the fox in the fable—but provides cosmopolitan fare, so that none of the songbirds, whether German, Frenchman, Italian or Spaniard, need fast. Ah, there is he of the shoeblacked hair. I will introduce him to you, so you can examine a celebrity at your leisure."

"Don't," said Betty feebly, fearing she knew not what.

"Why not?" Archie threw back at her, his amiability undisturbed. "I suppose that rascal Richard has been warning you against me. Now, my dear young lady, when I offer you a glass of soda-water, you may justly misdoubt it for fear that I, villain that I am, have put into it knockout drops or some other species of fictitious dope, such as exists only in the pages of dime novels and the science supplements of the yellow papers. But when I offer to introduce someone to you, to amuse you, in a house as eminently respectable as the Direktor's, you really must not suspect me of setting afoot a conspiracy to kidnap you."

"I never did," said Betty a little indignantly.

Archie laughed, and before she could say another word, darted off nimbly in pursuit of the gentleman against whom he had humorously influenced Betty. He returned with his prey a few seconds later, and, by way of introduction, mentioned an unpronounceable name to Betty.

"Miss Garside," Archie continued, "I think will be the Emma Eames of the rising generation of singers. Her voice is to be tested to-night."

"Indeed," said he of the shoeblacked hair very calmly, as if future Emma Eames were of slight importance to the world. "In appearance you remind me a leetle of—no, not of Eames, but of della Florenzia. Not so, Mr. Telfer?"

"I had not noticed it," said Archie indifferently.

"Joost a leetle," said the shoeblacked gentleman. "Joost a leetle, when della Florenzia is made up to look like a nice, pretty leetle maiden. But I hope your voice, Mees Garside, is better than della Florenzia's. Not so, Mr. Telfer?"

"To believe that it were no better would be an insult to Miss Garside," said Archie magnificently.

"True, quite true," assented the mustachioed gentleman. "Vell, we will see. We will see."

And with this prophecy, which signified nothing, he made his bow and passed on.

"Who was he?" asked Betty, smiling. Her smile carried the quality which smiles wear when amusement at the expense of someone else has been suppressed.

"The new musical conductor for the Wagnerian music-dramas, none greater," said Archie. "Miles have been written about his unsurpassed and unsurpassable interpretations."

"Not really?"

"Assuredly."

"And of whom did he say I reminded him?"

Archie pursed his lips enigmatically.

"A well-known vaudeville star," he replied, "and, as I said, I never noticed the faintest resemblance. The young lady is over there, near the tallest palm in the bay window."

Betty craned her neck discreetly, and caught a glimpse of a young woman, hardly older than herself, dressed in the choicest of French skin-tight gowns, and displaying a figure which might have tempted a sybarite; the shoulders which surmounted the figure would have undermined the fortitude of St. Anthony himself. Jewels tinkled at her corsage, a rope of pearls was wound about her right arm, which was bare to the shoulder, while the left sleeve, consisting of lattice-work of black velvet ribbon, secured with seed pearls, terminated at the elbow. One side of the gown was black, the other cherry-colored. Her entire little person exuded diablerie and witchery. Three layers of men were crowded about her, and it was only when a waiter approached with a glass of water which someone had requested that the

circle of homage-doers parted sufficiently to allow Betty a glimpse of the enchantress.

"She is very beautiful," Betty said, "isn't she?" She asked the question in all innocence, not realizing that an accomplished man of the world like Archie Telfer would take it as an invitation for a compliment.

"Not nearly as beautiful as the young lady she is said to resemble," he replied. "And now that my attention has been called to it, I believe there is a resemblance, though it is very slight. But there is a great difference between you in every other way."

"In what way, for instance?" Betty queried. "Her hair and eyes are black. So are mine. That is the entire resemblance, as I see it." She was not egotistical as a rule in seeking to focus the conversation about herself, but something about this woman, some subtle quality, a gliding, mysterious something, seemed to challenge her to invite Archie Telfer's comparative views.

"Well," said Archie, "for one thing,—you won't mind the comparison, I hope—she is more skillful than yourself in the art of dressing, and infinitely less scrupulous in pressing to the uttermost the seductions of which that art can be made capable."

Betty opened her eyes wide. Whatever might be said of Archie Telfer, a half-hour spent in his company was certainly not dull. His entire trend of thought seemed so opposed to that of every other person she had ever met, and his viewpoint on every conceivable subject seemed so totally unlike all ideas she was familiar with that she found him mightily interesting. That Dicky did not approve of her interest she was fully aware, and as she was convinced that the interest was purely platonic, purely conversational, it did not worry Betty very much that Dicky did not approve.

"Do tell me a little something about—what did you say her name was?"

"I didn't say at all. Her real name is Katharine—Kitty, for short—Florence. But Kitty Florence didn't suit this New York girl after she began to make a hit abroad, and she transformed herself into Katarina della Florenzia. Quite an improvement, eh? Well, Katarina had her affections badly wrenched last year. Count Hellersperg, scion of one of the oldest families of Austria, and the young lady were very much in love with each other last season."

"Why didn't they get married? Was there an obstacle?"

Archie suppressed his amusement.

"Well, I believe, so I've been told, the young man's father objected."

"If he loved her, I would think he would have married her all the same."

Archie thought, "Oh, Jehovah, what innocence," but he said, "So would I and so, of course, would any gentleman."

But if Betty was innocent, she was by no means silly. She asked abruptly:

"By the way, have you decided which of the three you are going to marry?"

"Bow-wow," said Archie. "However, the question does not phaze me in the least. I may have to answer it in court, and I shall answer in court as I answer you, that I may marry a fourth lady, a young lady with black hair, and black eyes, and a pair of the sweetest red lips I have ever seen."

He thought to embarrass her, but Betty said, laughing:

"Then surely you must be thinking of marrying Katarina della Florenzia."

"No, no, Katarina's near-double."

"Has she more than one near-double?" asked Betty, enjoying the nonsense thoroughly, and not realizing the danger of playing with a man of Archie Telfer's type, not knowing how formidable even the idlest badinage may become if it happens to touch the Achilles heel of so unscrupulous and accomplished a libertine as the handsome man beside her.

"She has only one near-double as far as I know," said Archie Telfer, "and she——"

"Is engaged, as far as I know," said Betty, laughing.

The natural excitement which the events to which she was looking forward that evening had engendered in her, the heavy air of the room permeated with the noticeable, peculiar quality existing in every room where many human personalities commingle, the drowsy fragrance of the cut-flowers, the undercurrent of music stirring somewhere behind the palms of the bay window and weaving itself through the rich, sonorous ocean of voices as a bank of clouds interlaces itself with the sky, all this had stimulated in her a quickness and alertness of thought and repartee which she ordinarily lacked. To Archie Telfer, expert appraiser of women, she had never seemed so womanly, in fact, she never had appeared to him as a woman at all until this evening. She had always seemed to him a naiad or a wood-nymph, a delicious fragrant young thing to look at, but rather tedious and unstimulating to all the senses except that of vision. He had never even desired her, as men are prone to desire women. To desire a woman with Archie Telfer was to secure her, since the women who attracted him were usually of loose or at least unstable virtue. This process Archie Telfer termed "picking flowers by the wayside." He had never expected to add this particular, tender, fragrant little hothouse blossom to his nosegay. He was not sure that he wanted it

now. He merely wondered, and decided to remain watchful.

"Engaged as far as you know," he repeated the phrase. "Engagements are made to be broken, you know."

"No, they're not," said Betty, speaking shyly, yet with pretty dignity. "They're contracted to culminate in marriage. Tell me more of Miss Kitty."

"What is there to tell? That she is not above making money by unscrupulous means?"

Archie hazarded the statement couched as a question to test Betty's innocence. He supposed, that after what he had previously said about Kitty's unfortunate love-affair, that Betty would now guess what the unscrupulous means of making money were. But Betty was divinely innocent with the innocence of the truly moral, which, though cognizant that evil exists, never attempts to connect any particular person with evil. Betty said:

"What do you mean? Smuggling? Playing bridge? Gambling? Not drinking?"

These were the worst and only forms of dissipation of which women could be guilty which occurred to Betty at the moment. Archie shrugged his shoulders, and said nothing, but in that brief second of time he became poignantly aware that, if he could, he would pick this particular blossom. What he felt for her was assuredly not love, since her innocence in no way attracted him to her, but merely made her appear ridiculous; he scarcely even desired her, for she aroused no intense pitch of emotion in him; his wish for her was simply the wish of the filthy-handed little guttersnipe who, seeing a clean, neatly dressed little child, does not rest until he has soiled the dainty freshly laundered gown of the other child with his own grimy hands. Archie Telfer was curious to see just how such purity, such whiteness

would conduct itself under given conditions. He concluded it was worth a try. He regretted that he had to leave town the next day, as he and his management had abruptly decided to postpone the opening night of "The Sun-God" in New York another two months, to the unutterable chagrin of the ticket-purchasers of the advance sale, in order "to try the show on the dog," the dog in this case being a string of towns stretching from New York to Chicago. Here, however, was something to look forward to upon his return. Gravely he pulled out his scented cambric handkerchief and knotted one corner of it.

"What are you doing that for?" Betty asked.

"To remind me of a matter I have to attend to on returning to New York."

"And will you keep the handkerchief in that gnarled condition all the time you are on the road?"

"No—I'm a methodical person. Every evening, like a sea-captain, I enter the knots I have made in my book."

"Who is that lady, an Italian, I think—with the sweet, sad face?"

"That? Theresia Hudrazzini—the famous soprano."

"Yes, thank you—I knew, of course, that she was a soprano and famous," Betty laughed. "What an angelic face!"

"She is a very charming woman. She also was on the *Proteus*. She was married when she was eighteen, and her husband died on the third anniversary of their marriage. She has not remarried, in spite of her extreme youth at the time of her husband's death, an unheard of state of affairs among operatic stars."

"I think it beautiful," said Betty enthusiastically.

Richard approached them, making his way with diffi-

culty through the crowd of people that separated him from Betty and Archie. He looked pale and excited.

"Instrumental contestants are to play first," he said. "There is one vocal contestant only, Betty—yourself. You are the last on the list. I come just before you."

"What's the object of having all these people here?" asked Betty.

"Direktor Markheim says Earlcote wants to judge of the stage presence of the contestants," Richard replied. "Hence he invited all these folks, and erected a small platform at the end of the room, as a miniature stage. They are drawing the curtains now."

"Has Earlcote come?" Betty asked curiously. "Have you seen him?"

Richard shuddered visibly. "I have seen him," he answered. "God forgive me for hating a man because he is a cripple. But I hate him. And I wish I were well out of this." He hesitated a moment. "If you do not wish to sing, Betty, ask Archie to take some message to the Direktor. You will, won't you, Archie, if Miss Garside wishes it?"

"Sure thing," said Archie. "You look as if you had the ague, Richard."

Richard shook himself to efface the disagreeable impression made upon him by Earlcote. "Did he affect you that way, too, Archie?"

"He affects everybody that way," Archie replied dryly. "He gives everybody a turn. I have warned Miss Garside not to fall in love with him, you know."

"You two men strike me as being very foolish and wicked," interpolated Betty calmly. "If Mr. Earlcote is a cripple, as Richard leads us to infer, that surely is a valid reason for pitying, not for hating, him."

"Suspend your judgment yet a while," Archie declaimed in his finest Shakespearian manner. "Wait till

you see him, my dear Miss Garside, and perhaps even your charity will take wings and fly away. Who is the first contestant, Richard?"

"A violinist chap named Isaac Abrahamovitz."

"Race unknown," remarked Archie Telfer.

"And the second?" Betty inquired.

"Another violinist—Patrick O'Rourke."

"A Frenchman from Cork. Next?"

"A pianist—Guiseppe Bartellomeo."

"A spaghetti-eater. Well, God be good to all of them."

"Last of the instrumentalists—myself. Then, Miss Garside."

Betty leaned forward excitedly.

"They are about to begin, Dick."

The two rooms, noisy with voices but a moment ago, were hushed and still. In front of the platform sat Mr. Telfer and the Direktor, and in a huge armchair, seated so that the back of the chair hid him from Betty's view, sat Stanley Earlcote. She watched the chair fascinatedly, hoping that his head might appear. She felt a singular curiosity to know what the musical pope, whose judgment all deferred to, looked like. Everybody was now seated, except the three liveried footmen, who, one by one, effaced thmselves through the double entrance door leading to the hall. Then, suddenly, the odd sensation came over Betty that sometimes comes in a dimly lighted room, and for a moment she seemed transplanted from the world of reality to the realm of dreams, for there, against the doors stood two figures which Betty had not noticed before, two turbaned figures in Oriental costume, standing so immovably still that for the space of five seconds Betty thought they were figures carved in wood or statues cast in bronze or hewn out of stone and merely part and parcel of the strange paraphernalia that littered the room.

"Look," she whispered to Archie Telfer, "are they real?"

Archie nodded, smiled gaily, and whispered:

"They are Dushka and Hahdjan, Earlcote's Hindu servants. He cannot walk any distance without their assistance, you know."

Betty had not known, and her new knowledge unaccountably sent a chill down her back, and filled her with a throbbing, fascinated interest. Her glances alternated as between two magnets from the back of Earlcote's chair to his two servants. She began to wish that she had taken Richard's advice, and had made some excuse for not singing. She began to fear this man without knowing him. His very servants exuded an atmosphere of subtle, menacing malignancy. Incredibly still they stood, like well-trained supernumeraries in some Oriental extravaganza, the bizarre lavishness of their Eastern dress heightening the fantastic weirdness which was engulfing Betty.

The audience began applauding—the good-natured, meaningless applause extended as an amenity of greeting, a sort of aural handshake, to a public performer. Isaac Abrahamovitz, a swarthy young Hebrew of decidedly prepossessing exterior, made his bow, and waited for the accompanist to begin.

He had not played for more than five minutes when a sharp voice—Earlcote's voice, since it emanated from behind the chair—cried:

"Stop it, stop it."

The young man, abashed and perplexed, thinking he had misunderstood, after a momentary break, continued his playing. Again the metallic voice of Earlcote clanged through the room.

"Stop it—stop it!"

Isaac Abrahamovitz, looking amazed rather than embarrassed, came to a dead stop. The accompanist hur-

ried on for a bar or two, then, perceiving that something was wrong, stopped also. The voice of Earlcote, each note of which sounded like metal ringing upon metal, rasped:

"My advice to you is to go back to a musical kindergarten for a while."

The insult was so gratuitous and so unexpected that young Abrahamovitz, utterly at sea, for a few seconds stared in silence at the man who had hurled it at him. Then, without a word, he left the platform.

Mr. Telfer and Direktor Markheim looked at each other with faces that were worth studying. They glanced at each other questioningly, and they glanced apologetically and commiseratingly at the victim of Earlcote's brutality, but they dared offer no protest.

Patrick O'Rourke, the second violinist, stepped upon the platform. The jaw of his handsome Irish face was set to a bulldog pattern.

"If Earlcote dares do the same over again," Betty whispered to Archie, "something is going to happen. He looks as if he would like to kill Earlcote."

"He may think so," Archie whispered back, "but he'll change his mind quick enough once Earlcote looks at him."

Young O'Rourke had begun playing. Betty thought he played very well and with much feeling. But suddenly, without warning, as before, came Earlcote's command:

"Stop it—stop it!"

O'Rourke heard him perfectly, but went on playing, glaring defiance from the platform at Earlcote. Again Earlcote snarled out his command, and again O'Rourke defied him. Suddenly a stick, wielded by Earlcote's hand, began beating upon the platform, splitting O'Rourke's playing into a series of jarring, discordant

sounds. O'Rourke stopped, and shook his fist at Earlcote, whose voice rasped out:

"You use your violin as if it were a nutmeg-grater. Off with you."

For one moment it seemed as if there might be a scuffle, so belligerently did the young Irishman glare down upon his verbal assailant. Then suddenly his belligerency changed into disgust, almost terror. Muttering something, he turned and went from the platform.

This time Telfer and the Direktor interfered. They bent over Earlcote's chair, both speaking at the same time. What they said was not heard, for throughout the room a hubbub of voices arose. Whatever their little professional jealousies may be, professional folk are courteous souls, and indignation ran high. They were protesting in no uncertain way in French, German, Italian, Spanish. They were reading Earlcote a polyglot riot act, and their gestures seemed to indicate that they contemplated throwing him out of the room.

Suddenly the Direktor, seizing a baton, rapped upon the platform. The undercurrent of voices was hushed, and finally died away.

"Signor Guiseppe Bartellomeo will now favor us," he said.

The Italian was a fragile-looking youth of about three and twenty, who looked badly scared. He was permitted to play all of the Barcarole he had selected as his first piece. When he finished, Earlcote began:

"I beg to suggest, my young friend, that you learn to use the piano more gently. It is not a kettledrum. Expressive playing is due not to muscular strength but to feeling. You need not play your second selection. You are not ripe for a European scholarship."

The Italian, thankful to have come off so easily, made his escape from the improvised stage. Betty became

intolerably nervous. She shifted her chair, and in doing so, caught sight of Earlcote for the first time. She suppressed a cry of horror only with difficulty, and unconsciously, as if for protection, stretched out her hand to Archie, who was not slow to take it, pressing it caressingly; but she, trembling violently from the shock which the sight of Earlcote had communicated to her, was not even aware of the liberty of which Archie was availing himself.

The face of Earlcote was the most hideous face she had ever seen. His complexion was very pale, the complexion of an Octoroon or a Creole. There was not a vestige of color in either cheeks or lips, but the tip of the nose was faintly pink, by which token those who hated him pretended to establish his negro ancestry. The small, greenish-gray eyes had no brilliancy, but were dull and heavy, like the eyes of a dead fish. The entire head of Earlcote was as grotesque, as repulsive, and as suggestive of evil as the heads of gargoyles which are found on all mediæval churches, those fictitious monsters so hideous to look upon that the onlooker cannot gaze upon them, though they are presentments of monstrous forms that never existed, without emotions of distress and loathing. Hideous as was the face of Stanley Earlcote, his body was more repulsive still. As he sat there, hunched together in the deep recesses of the comfortable chair which had been placed for him, he seemed an invertebrate mass of flesh,—flesh without underlying structure of bones to hold erect, to dignify, to ennoble into purpose and dynamic force and form.

His one hand lay inert and motionless upon the arm of the chair, but it seemed not the hand of a human being, rather the monstrous conception of some weirdly imaginative artist depicting some defunct specimen of near-man that existed before Adam, a specimen of a

species so outrageous that nature had mercifully wiped it away from the sane and beautiful earth. His fingers were hideous stumps, the knuckles, where the fingers join the hand, were gnarled and contorted and twisted.

"Good Heavens," whispered Betty. "That thing, that monster, that prodigy to judge her Richard!"

Archie looked at her feelingly. She thought only of Richard, not of herself, but Archie thought he detected in her an acute attack of stage fright, and since even he, the Adonis, the Sun-God, the *ne plus ultra* of men who adorned the stage, had experienced that species of torment, he felt sorry for her.

"Don't get stagitis, whatever you do," he whispered, pressing her hand. It was purely by a reflex action that Betty withdrew her hand from his, for she was as unconscious of the fact that Archie had been holding it as of the fact that she herself had extended it to him.

"There is Richard now," she murmured.

Richard, looking pale and exaggeratedly composed, made his best bow, seated himself and began. He had chosen one movement from Beethoven's Sonata, Op. 53, to be followed by Chopin's Funeral March. In view of Earlcote's summary measures, it was, of course, doubtful whether he would be permitted to play his second selection. Betty felt an intolerable nervousness surging up in her as she watched Richard. To her surprise, he was perfectly self-possessed and played as authoritatively as at home. If he was nervous, it was not apparent in his playing. And his interpretation, to which he had given months of study, was emphatic and lucid.

Betty, satisfied that all was well with her Dick, gave her attention to Earlcote. As she watched him while he listened to Richard's playing, a curtain seemed lifted from that evil countenance. A look of alertness came into the dull, dead eyes; and the colorless mouth, which

before had seemed a mere slit in the gray face, was pursed as in token of subtle satisfaction. She felt certain from watching Earlcote's face that Richard was playing well, very, very well indeed, and that he, at least, had nothing to fear from Earlcote. But suddenly the expression of satisfaction on Earlcote's face changed and was succeeded by an ignoble look of malice, cunning and deadly hatred. The inert, malformed body seemed to become infused with malevolent energy.

Betty was perplexed. Had Richard made some mistake. Was his nervousness getting the upper hand, to the detriment of his playing? She divided her attention between Richard's playing and Earlcote's face, riveting her eyes upon the man who was to judge her lover and decide his future. Suddenly she clenched her hands in impotent anger. She understood the expression on Stanley Earlcote's face now. Love made the simple, inexperienced, artless little girl clairvoyant. Oh, yes, she understood! Let Stanley Earlcote now have the temerity to criticize her Richard's playing!

"Play the next piece," rasped the discordantly harsh voice of Earlcote. Richard, who had risen to acknowledge the plentiful applause accorded him, reseated himself and played Chopin's Funeral March, played it somberly, delicately, intelligently. Betty was jubilant. She revised her estimate of Earlcote. He had asked Richard to play his second selection, so that he was just after all. Probably the others had played vilely, and the man, being a monumental genius himself, could not tolerate mediocrity in others. Such things had been. She had misinterpreted the expression in his face, and in her heart she asked his pardon. But when she looked at him there welled up in her anew repugnance and loathing—a hatred bitter and deadly, corroding and poisonous. She tried to reason with herself. Never before

had she been caught in the toils of so unreasonable and unjustified a feeling as this, and she was a little ashamed of its virulence and of her inability to cope with it.

Richard had finished. Once more there was a salvo of applause, and when this died away Earlcote's voice rang out clear and cold:

"You have a marvelous facility of touch, marvelous. Your phrases are cleanly trimmed. But that is all that can be said in favor of your playing. You play with as much expression as an automaton. You pride yourself, very evidently, upon your intellectual playing—don't interrupt me. I know what I know."

Richard's face was ghostlike in its pallor as he answered:

"I certainly think that the interpreter ought to attempt to make intelligible to the audience the composer's ideas."

"Composer's ideas! Nonsense." Earlcote's voice was terrible. He waved his hideous hands to and fro as if to emphasize what he was saying. "Ideas,—so that is what music exists for—to make ideas intelligible. It is the fashion, nowadays, I know, to talk of musical ideas and color in music. Music, my friend, is great enough to stand on its own merits. It need not borrow ideas from books, or color from painting. No really great composer composed because he had 'ideas' which he wanted to render intelligible. He composed to give vent to some feeling, an emotion, a love, a hate. By and by, when you begin to compose—don't tell me you won't, because you will—you will probably try to go Richard Strauss one better. He was content to attempt to render intelligible Nietzsche's 'Also sprach Zarathustra.' Perhaps you will attempt to explain through the medium of music Kant's *Das Ding an Sich.* I hope you will succeed."

Richard, pale and erect, stood glowering upon Earlcote as the latter poured forth his torrent of sarcasm. Earlcote continued:

"Let me show you the mire into which your intellectual playing betrays you. You are so hot on the trail of 'ideas' that you take unwarrantable liberties with the score. In the Sonata you overlaid the counterpoint of the treble with emphasis, you elaborated and embroidered it, thereby degrading the *cantus firmus* in the left hand, and rendering it wholly inconspicuous. That is the result of having 'ideas' which you feel yourself called upon to infuse in the music, instead of contenting yourself to play the music and play it again and again, until the composer's mood, like a fiery cloud, has descended upon you. Ideas!"

"From what I have read about the interpretation of music,"—Richard began, but Earlcote interrupted him roughly:

"There you are—you read about music—you haven't enough music in you to make you feel how a thing should be played. And you pretend to be a musician, a pianist! Music, my young friend, is meant to be heard, not to be read about. I suppose you read your score half a dozen times before attempting to play it. Do you? You read it by the hour, and by and by you begin to have 'ideas.' At such and such a passage, you say to yourself, 'Here the composer meant to tell us that he believed in a future life, and that he based his belief not on Christian anthropomorphism but on natural law in the scientific and spiritual world. And then, at last, you go to the piano and begin to play. Am I right?"

Richard, white and distrait-looking, answered not a word. Earlcote continued his tirade:

"There are composers who compose on paper without use of any musical instrument. They, too, have ideas,

not feelings. But music generates here," he indicated his heart, "not here," he tapped the brow of his gargoyle head.

"Then," he continued, "you had the impertinence to leave off the Finale from the funeral march. I suppose this presented no new idea worth your while, because someone has been inconsiderate enough to describe it as invoking the vision of the night wind sweeping over graves. Am I right?"

"It is not played usually," said Richard. "Therefore I omitted it."

Earlcote paid no attention to Richard's reply.

"So much for your ability," he said. "Well, you, too, will not travel to Europe at the expense of the Musical Progress League, not until there is a little more feeling evidenced in your work. At present a mechanical piano-player made by a third-rate manufacturer and bought at fourth hand for a seventh-rate saloon in the slums plays with more expression than yourself."

Richard drew himself to full height, gave Earlcote a scathing look of contempt, and sprang lightly down the steps of the platform. Simultaneously a hundred voices were raised in protest.

"Outrageous!" cried one Spanish tenor who had set all New York by the ears with his beautiful voice. "Outrageous! He played excellently well."

"Why, the young man has a touch that will be golden when time has mellowed it," authoritatively declared a woman of about fifty, who, as Betty learned later on, was the dean of the foremost musical conservatory of the city. One and all these artists, who had been asked to come and listen, were constituting themselves judges not only of the player, but of the player's judge. It was a dramatic scene. Stage folks, almost all of them, and accustomed to the large, free gestures required by

grand opera, they were backing up their opinions with eloquent hands. It was a Babel of tongues and digits that clamored about Earlcote's chair.

He rose heavily, supported by the Direktor and Mr. Telfer, and, leaning against the platform, faced the turbulent crowd of men and women, like a mad dog holding at bay its pursuers.

"I have given my honest opinion," he snapped. "The Herr Direktor and Mr. Telfer may take it or leave it, as they please. Of course if I am to be disregarded and my opinion flaunted, money being spent where I disapprove, I will ask to retire at once, instantaneously, from the committee to which I have been appointed."

Direktor Markheim held out imploring hands; Mr. Telfer looked supinely afraid. It was easy to see that they would not risk incurring the disaster with which Earlcote threatened to overwhelm them by taking decisive steps in Richard's favor.

An unusual sensation swept over Betty. Keenly aware of what she was doing, she rose. At the moment it seemed to her that she was not the timid, shy little girl whose face looked out from the mirror every morning while she was combing her hair, but an entirely different person. It seemed to her that the spirit of an older woman had suddenly possessed itself of little Betty's body, and was using it as a mouthpiece. She was amazed at what was happening, and yet she knew that she could not act otherwise than she was doing.

She stepped upon the first step of the stairs leading to the miniature stage, in order to be able to make herself heard. Then addressing Earlcote, she said:

"You said just now that you gave your honest opinion of Richard Pryce's playing. That is not true. You know that he played well, wonderfully well. One could read that in your face while he played. But you pre-

tend to find his playing contemptible, you disparage it, *because you are jealous of him.* That's all."

Mr. Telfer and Direktor Markheim made their way to her side, imploring her to be silent, but Betty's clear young voice rang out triumphantly above theirs.

Earlcote turned heavily and slowly, and, leaning on his elbow, looked at her. Betty's heart sank within her as that graceless, flabby, seared countenance was turned toward her.

"And who are you?" Earlcote asked.

"Richard Pryce's affianced wife and the vocal contestant," Betty replied. There was a little quaver in her voice, and in her frantic nervousness she began plucking at the roses she held in her hand. The soft white petals, bruised and crushed, gave up an enchanting fragrance, but Betty noticed it not. One by one the roses dropped from their stems, dismembered by the girl's nervous fingers. Earlcote watched her, without speaking, until the last petal had fluttered to the floor. Then he spoke.

"If you are the vocal contestant, perhaps you had better sing. Have you also 'Ideas' about music?"

"At present," said Betty, "I haven't a single idea; only an emotion."

"And that emotion——?"

"The primitive and savage emotion of hatred," said Betty, shaking a little, and speaking the angry words in a very small voice indeed. "Hatred for the man who, because he is jealous of my Richard's ability, is trying to ruin his future."

Earlcote laughed.

"Come, come," he said, speaking very gently, his metallic voice metallic still but chiming now like bells ringing across the snow. "I like you. It is not often anyone has the courage to defy me." He made an inviting

gesture, signifying that he wished Betty to step upon the platform. It was a gesture such as a prince might have employed in doing homage to a queen, and this astonishing and unexpected gentleness on the part of Earlcote frightened Betty intensely. She stared at him in alarm.

"You need not be afraid," he said, speaking more gently still. His voice was almost a caress. "You need not be afraid. I do not treat little white roses, little white human roses, as cruelly as you have treated the white buds at your breast."

Only then Betty became aware that she had torn the flowers to pieces. She threw away the stems, and with the courage of despair ran up the steps to the platform. It was only when she stood beside the piano, with the accompanist already playing the introductory bars, that Betty became poignantly aware of the conspicuous part she had allowed herself to play before all these celebrated men and women. For one moment she thought she must die of shame. Then, remembering she had publicly proclaimed herself to be Richard's future wife, she essayed to do her best.

She sang Schumann's "Schlummerlied" and "Erlkoenig," and, so nervous was she, she expected Earlcote to interrupt her momentarily. She dared not look at him for fear of reading contempt and disdain in those sneering features. But when she had finished, he said:

"The evening has not been wholly wasted. At last we have heard an artist who is worth the expenditure of a small fortune. This child has a golden voice, a voice all limpid sweetness and rich purity and unfeigned strength. We will make a great singer of you, little white rose."

Betty stared down upon Earlcote and the sea of friendly faces that confronted her incredulously. There

was incessant applause mingled with hisses because it was apparent that Earlcote wished to say more. The strange, potent agency known as the psychology of the masses was at work, and from being an object of detestation because of his brutality to the four young men, Earlcote suddenly assumed the proportions of a hero in the eyes of those present because he was treating with generous courtesy the young girl who had offered him a mortal affront.

"I wish to talk further with you," said Earlcote to Betty. "You have not had much teaching, have you?"

"Hardly any."

Betty wanted to tell him then and there that she had no intention of becoming a singer. But some mysterious power forced back her words. She wanted to cry out and tell Earlcote that she wanted none of his kindness, but words failed her. She wished ardently that he would be rough and rude with her as he had been with Richard; his gentleness—that intolerably caressing note in his voice—was more of an assault than any verbal brutality would have been.

Earlcote was speaking again.

"Before we have our personal talk," he said, "I am going to do for you what I would not do for any other man or woman here present; what I refused to do at the request of the German Emperor or the Czar—though each of those potentates offered me a small fortune. I am going to play for you."

Like a serpent, undulating, swift, now here and now there, word ran through the assemblage that Earlcote was going to play. They proclaimed it in all languages: "He is going to play!" *"Er wird spielen!" "Il nous donnera quelque chose!" "Come! Suona!" "El va a tocar!"*

They were mad with joy. They all but embraced each

other. Their delight approached frenzy. "Earlcote is going to play!"

Dushka and Hahdjan were summoned, and they helped him up the stairs. Terrific applause resounded as he seated himself at the piano.

"I want no applause," Earlcote rasped. "I am not playing for you or you or you." Swiftly the hideous hands emphasized the phrase by pointing to two or three of those whose applause was loudest. "I am playing because it suits me to play for a little white human rose."

He poised his hands in midair, then faced Betty once more.

"There are excellent folks, musicians some of them, who think that the piano is not a musical instrument at all, and that its only legitimate function is to help composers evolve the melodies of the various instruments while fixing them on paper. Those good folks forget that in conceding the piano's value in orchestration, they tacitly admit that every voice in the orchestra is contained in the piano. And that is the truth. You shall hear.

"One word more. Do not think that I am going to play because you accused me of being jealous of that whipper-snapper. I play to please you, because your singing pleased me."

He ran the hideous misformed stumps, that served him for fingers, across the keys of the piano.

"Because it fatigues me greatly to play," he said, "I can play you one piece only. I chose Chopin's funeral march, complete with the finale. After you have heard me play that, I think you will not accuse me of being jealous of any pianist, dead or alive, past or present, again."

He had not played a dozen bars before Betty under-

stood the excitement of those present upon hearing that Earlcote would play. Richard had taken her to hear many famous pianists, but she realized now that the others were the merest tyros compared to Earlcote. He had spoken truly when he said that every voice of the orchestra lurks in the piano and only waits to be awakened to the pianist's touch. Even as she stood watching him play, it seemed incredible to the girl that this inconceivable volume of melody, this tempestuous flood of sound, this ocean of harmony should be drawn from one single instrument. The gentle voice of the flute was heard, the plaintive wail of the oboe, the sound of argent-throated chimes, the fierce braying of the kettle-drum, the insidious sweetness of French horn and bassoon, the sonorous loveliness of the 'cello; even the pizzicato of violins rose as by magic from under Earlcote's fingers. How did he do it? It was the prodigious feat of a supreme musical genius. Presently her wonder at the plenitude of witching sound which he was extracting, as by magic, from the one miserable instrument, ceased. For a few moments a vague thought persisted that it was monstrous that those deformed fingers should be capable of producing music so heavenly. Even that thought died away. She had the sensation of having been lulled asleep on a vast bosom of sound. Thought abandoned her, sensations only rippled and thrilled through her. She crept closer and closer to an elusive, intangible something which she knew intuitively was her own soul. But she could not think. She tried to rouse herself, to translate her sensations into words. Language eluded her, leaving her the prey of myriad emotions, bizarre, gigantic, untried. Suddenly fear came upon her—a horrid, weird, ghastly fear. Earlcote was playing the finale, and Betty shuddered as a sleep-walker may shudder who at midnight wakes to find himself

wandering among graves, with the night wind and falling leaves as his sole companion.

The music ceased. Betty came back to time and space as from a trance. Dead silence reigned—not a soul applauded. The sensation Earlcote had created was so startling as to preclude applause.

Earlcote had risen from the piano and was speaking. He addressed Betty directly. It no longer seemed singular to her that he should address himself solely to her.

"They do not applaud," he said. "Nor do you. That is not out of deference for my wish, but because I have made them forget themselves, because I have made them forget the habit of rewarding the trick dog by making a noise." A low, mocking laugh came from his lips. "No one can do just that but I, Stanley Earlcote."

"It was the most wonderful thing I ever heard," Betty said truthfully.

"Really? Then you have modified your judgment—you realize I am not jealous, eh? Now, we will have our little private talk, you and I."

His Hindus helped him down from the platform, and carried rather than assisted him to his chair. A change had come over him. Exhausted, his face was paler than before, his lips were drawn into a sinuous curve with an intense effort of some sort. His eyes closed and he sat in silence in the large armchair. Fascinatedly, Betty stared at him. Loathing, repugnance, disgust were uppermost in her mind, but she could not drag her eyes away from the man who inspired these emotions. Finally he spoke, his eyes still closed. Betty came and stood near his chair. The others tactfully turned away and formed little animated groups among themselves.

"You have a wonderful voice, Miss Garside. But you ill-treat it. You use it as if it were a mechanical toy.

There is no soul in it. That is wicked. A voice such as yours without feeling and depth behind it is a monstrosity, a worse monstrosity than myself."

He opened his eyes and fixed them on Betty's face.

"Have you ever been in love?" he said.

"I told you before that I am engaged to Richard Pryce."

"Engaged, yes. One marries for a host of reasons other than love. Do you happen to love the whipper-snapper?"

"Yes, devotedly."

"Devotedly? Hm! Passionately?"

Betty flushed furiously.

"I consider the question an impertinence," she said. There was no occasion for speaking as viciously as she did, and she was aware of it, but she wanted to defy this creature, this self-dubbed monstrosity who played like a god.

"A physician may ask any question he likes," Earlcote responded quietly. "And I am the physician of your singing voice. So, if you please, answer me. Do you love the whipper-snapper passionately?"

Betty bit her lip.

"Passion," she said slowly, "is a thing I despise. I have never felt it, and never intend to feel it. I should hate myself if I did. One cannot expect anything else from men, but women should be above it."

Earlcote laughed long and mockingly. But he did not sneer. And the fact that he again treated her mildly infuriated Betty anew. She was insolent, brutal, impertinent to him, and he, who outrageously insulted everyone else, remained gentle and pacific under her most stinging remarks and unmistakably vicious retorts.

"You have much to learn," he said finally. "There are thorns on the stem of the white rose, and she knows

how to use them. Passion, Miss Garside, slumbers in the heart of all, and some day it will awaken in you. It will not be to your detriment. You wish to be a famous singer?"

"I do not."

"What's that?"

"I do not. Richard Pryce entered my name without consulting me, and I could not withdraw without stultifying him. I do not intend accepting the scholarship. It is rightfully Richard's, at any rate."

"Do you mean to tell me that you are going to throw away this splendid opportunity because you love a silly, incompetent boy so *devotedly?* Or is it rather because you are too lazy to put forth the exertion which is unavoidable in the career of every great artist?"

"You certainly ask the most extraordinary questions."

"I ask questions that go beneath the surface, that eat right into the human soul and bite into its marrow. It is a habit of mine to penetrate to the holy of holies. Witness my playing. Well, I am waiting for your answer?"

"I have never thought about it, really," said Betty gravely. "I love Dicky, and I wish you wouldn't call him a whipper-snapper and other things. I want him to go abroad and have a big career. And I hate you for giving an unfavorable verdict."

"Well, well—you will get over that. By and by you will realize that you are of more consequence to yourself than to anyone else. Believe me, my child, love—passion—are valuable, because they help us delve down to the very bottom of our own souls. We do not know ourselves as we are until love has touched us. And when love comes to you, give yourself up to it, speak about it, write about it, read about it, dream about it, for days, nights, weeks, months and years, but do not

make the fatal mistake of forgetting your emotions. Retain those. Gather them in the precious chalice of your soul, and when you sing great music, the priceless drops of recollection which you have collected in that precious cup will filter one by one into your voice. No woman can be a great singer unless she has loved. Love alone unbars the citadel of the universe for women, even more than for men."

Betty looked at him in helpless bewilderment.

"You speak like a poem," she said with grudging admiration. "But I will never change."

Earlcote regarded her quizzically.

"You're a normal woman, aren't you?" he asked. "You were born of normal parents? You're not an artificial womanikin, made of wood and animated by ingenious clockwork? You're flesh and blood, aren't you? Being all that, the passions of womankind are bound to come to you, and once you are married, and know the ecstasy that passionate kisses bring, then there will enter into your voice the quality it now lacks—the one quality it needs to make it perfect."

"How dare you say such things to me?" Betty demanded. "How dare you?"

"I dare many things, when I wish to gain my point. You are right. You must not go to Europe. You will remain here, in New York, and I will teach you—I, Stanley Earlcote—and I will make of you the greatest singer of the century."

"Never."

"How you hate me, you little white thing."

"Yes, I do."

"I will play for you. I will play for you so often and so sweetly that to please me and because you want to hear me play again, you will be willing to learn to sing with me."

"You are mistaken."

"Yes, you will. Do you realize what a sacrifice I made when I played for you?" He lifted his poor maimed hands. "Look—I am in intolerable anguish because I played. I will suffer all night."

"I am glad of it."

For the second time that evening a woman, older and more experienced than herself, seemed to have usurped dominion of her body and organs of speech. Perhaps her future self, such as she would be after life had emptied a phial of cruelty into her soul to subsist side by side with the compassion which was her heritage as a woman.

She knew that her reply had been monstrous, unfeminine, insensate, and even while she voiced it. she was sorry for her words.

Earlcote did not reply. A smile seemed to flicker about the thin, colorless lips.

"I am sorry," she stammered. "Please forgive me—it was quite, quite horrid of me to say that."

"There is a good deal of passion in you," he replied enigmatically, "and it will wake, perhaps, who knows, it is waking now." He looked at her shrewdly, his little cat's eyes agleam like beryl or green jade.

"Mr. Telfer tells me you are one of his pianists," Earlcote continued. "I am coming to the store some day, and then we will have a long talk. I am too tired now to argue with you any longer. Good-night, and pleasant dreams."

He put out his hand, but Betty shrank visibly from the clasp of that deformed hand. Her horror of it was pictured in her face. She sought to control her features. She was sorry that she was showing the aversion, the overwhelming physical repugnance which she experienced at the mere thought of having to touch that hideous member, but show it she did.

Earlcote withdrew his hand. Betty's face was crimson.

"I am ashamed of myself," she said in a low, subdued voice.

"You need not be," Earlcote responded. "I do not blame you for drawing back in shuddering horror from touch of my hand. I would not have offered it had I remembered. Sometimes, mercifully, I still forget that they are what they are, that I am what I am. Once more, good-night."

Turning, Betty found Archie Telfer at her side.

"I have great news for you," he said, ignoring Earlcote. "Madame Hudrazzini asked me to find you and bring you to her. Unfortunately, in the crowd we became separated, and I must locate her before I can take you to her."

He took Betty to a quiet corner, and then went in search of the famous singer.

Betty's brain was awhirl. A host of new emotions were crowding upon her. She was bitterly ashamed of herself for having spoken so brutally to Earlcote. He had been gentle and kind to her, and she had wantonly offered him insult upon insult. What had possessed her to do so? Then, with a start, she remembered his brutality to Richard, and it seemed disloyal of her that she had forgotten that for even one single second. She was glad now that she had spoken with the effrontery she had employed. She felt a new access of cruelty and hatred, and pressing her hands together as they lay in her lap, she wondered vaguely at the change which was occurring in her.

Archie Telfer was wandering about meanwhile in search of the famous Italian soprano. In his perambulations he came upon Earlcote, still lolling in his chair, with closed eyes. Archie Telfer stopped, looked sneer-

ingly upon the recumbent figure, and drawing up a chair, sat down beside Earlcote. He changed the expression of his face with the facility of the expert actor before addressing the great pianist.

"Mr. Earlcote," he asked, "do you really think Miss Garside's voice so very wonderful?"

"Why should I utter an untruth?" Earlcote opened his eyes and glared venomously at Archie.

Archie laughed.

"Honey and a spider's web to catch a dainty, pretty little fly," he said.

Earlcote scowled.

"You judge others by yourself, Mr. Telfer. The girl has a marvelous voice. I am going to teach her."

"Has she consented?"

"No, but she will."

"Not if I know her."

"What do you mean? Why do you say that? Do you know her very well?"

"Not nearly well enough," Archie replied, giving peculiar emphasis to the words so as to bring out the double meaning. Earlcote looked at him with witheri contempt.

"Aren't three breach of promise suits enough, Telfer?" he asked cuttingly.

"There are women who would rather die than h a suit of that sort," Archie retorted carelessly. cote contrived to raise himself on his elbow.

"What's your object in palavering like this?" I manded.

"To do you a good turn."

"Indeed!"

[illegible] raised his Jovian brows and intently [illegible] patent leather boot. "M

you subjected to such a merciless grilling—Richard Pryce."

"Devotedly! That is the same expression she herself used."

"Proof positive that I know what I am talking about. So long as this devoted and romantic attachment continues not you or any man or woman alive will contrive to make her consider a career for herself."

"The inference?"

"Mr. Earlcote, you are usually shrewd enough to draw your own inferences. Yet, lest you accuse me of cowardice, I will dot the I and cross the T. The attachment to Richard must be broken."

"And you propose, I suppose, to do that by replacing Richard in Miss Garside's affections?"

"To go about the thing in that way is impossible. Does that admission surprise you? At least it proves that I am not the conceited jackanapes I am usually represented to be. I am distinctly aware of my limitations. With a certain type of woman I need only appear on the scene to complete a conquest. But that little white rose—to use your own pretty simile—is loyal to the bottom of her little white heart. Richard for her always and forever—unless Richard prove faithless."

Archie paused, and Earlcote looked at him searchingly.

"You certainly have crossed the T," he said. "Now you had better go ahead and dot the I."

"Richard also is loyal to his Betty. But alas, Earlcote, you and I, we know the genus man. The nature of the beast makes an occasional wallowing in the mire almost inevitable. Now, if Richard's affections might be alienated, I say might—you perceive the point?"

"I see. Delightfully diabolical, Telfer. And once Richard's affections have been alienated, what then?"

"With Richard out of the way, who would stand the better chance with her, you or I?"

Earlcote winced, but recovered himself quickly.

"Her voice," he said quietly, "is all I want."

"Her voice," said Archie Telfer, "is *not* what I want. You are welcome to it. We shall not conflict."

"What an unutterable knave you are."

"Yet you will profit by the knave's suggestion, or I err greatly in my estimate of yourself. Look yonder—quick."

Katarina della Florenzia, alias Kitty Florence, was going through the room on the arm of the Direktor, with a half-score of adorers in her wake.

"Well?" asked Earlcote. "What has she got to do with it?"

"Someone pointed out to me that she slightly resembles Miss Garside. Possibly you have seen her abroad, in Lehar's operetta—the latest one?"

"Yes."

"She took the part of sweet seventeen. Do you remember?"

"Perfectly."

"She need only repeat that makeup in real life to make herself look so much like Betty Garside that the two might appear in a sister act—if the stage were in Miss Garside's line."

"Well, what of it?"

"You are forcing me to dot the I with a vengeance, Earlcote. If Kitty set herself out to alienate Richard's affections, garbed not in silks and satins and tons of jewelry, but in sprigged muslin and coral beads, do you think she would succeed?"

"You certainly are a knave of the purest water, Telfer. But you're clever, I'll admit that—devilishly clever."

Archie rose and made Earlcote a sweeping bow.

"Machiavelli complimenting Beelzebub," he said. "At any rate, I have tipped you off, and a word to the wise is sufficient. Au revoir, my dear Earlcote."

Leaving Earlcote in frowning solitude, Archie made his way through the room, found Madame Hudrazzini quite readily in the alcove where she had been sitting all the time, and then went back to Betty. Having introduced Betty at last, he tactfully withdrew.

The famous singer was a tall, large brunette, with a brilliantly sweet smile. She had the ineffably graceful, bewitching, ingratiating manner of the prima donna who has been brought up on *bel canto* and torrents of nightly applause.

"My dear," she said to Betty, "I am enchanted with you. Yes, yes, also with your voice, which is all Earlcote says, but particularly, *carissima,* with you and your courage. You will be a very great singer some day, much greater than poor little Hudrazzini."

Betty's ears tingled.

"That could never be," she said, and because the great lady smiled upon her so adorably, and petted her hand and cheek, she found courage to launch into a longer speech than she would have trusted herself with ordinarily in much less distinguished society. "Do you remember the story of one of Napoleon's Marshals, Madame Hudrazzini? Napoleon said of him, 'It is possible that another man may be as honest as he, but more honest, impossible.' One might paraphrase that to apply to your voice. Some day some other soprano may be found who has a voice as beautiful as yours, but more beautiful—impossible."

Madame Hudrazzini was so delighted with Betty's little speech that she clapped her hands and kissed her fingers as if to waft a kiss to Betty with the pretty,

Latin, curtain-call gestures which made a devoted slave of every individual in her nightly audiences.

"I am more and more enchanted, my dear," she cried. "Will you come to see me? I am living at the Astor until I find a suitable apartment for myself. Yes, you must come. When will you start for Europe? Has anything been decided? I saw you speaking to Earlcote for a long time."

"Mr. Earlcote wishes to teach me himself," Betty said. "But I have no ambition whatever."

Madame Hudrazzini held up her hands in blank amazement.

"Surely you will not refuse to let Earlcote teach you," she said. "He is reputed to have more musicianship than any man or woman alive. After hearing him, I am willing to subscribe to that."

"But I am engaged to Richard Pryce."

"Yes——?"

"I wish to see him happy. I want him to make a great name for himself."

"That does not preclude the possibility of your doing the same for yourself, *carissima.*"

"But I do not wish to," said Betty obstinately.

Madame Hudrazzini took Betty's hand in hers.

"Dear child," she said, "think well before you refuse Earlcote's offer. Let me tell you a little of my own life. I was desperately in love with the man I married, and if it had not been for our abject poverty, I would not have continued on the stage, for I loved him so dearly that I wanted to live only for him. I resented everything else as an intrusion. That is how you feel?"

"You understand me perfectly," said Betty.

"Well, after a few years my husband died. Then, *carissima,* I think I would have gone insane if it had not been for my music. Always keep two interests in

your life, a big one and a little one. For a woman, love must always be the big interest, art the little one. With a man it is the reverse. For him, no matter how he loves, love is a lesser thing to him than his day's work. That is right and just, hard as it may seem to us."

"I do not believe that is so," said Betty with trembling lips. "I do not believe Richard puts his art before me."

"Possibly not," said Madame Hudrazzini dryly. "But for us women, dear child, love reaches deeper than with men, though it touches us less violently. With a man passion is a mighty, majestic, turbulent river, flowing tempestuously within narrow limits—all the stronger perhaps because thus forced into narrow bounds, but leaving the adjacent territory arid and untouched. With a woman passion is an expansive system of placid lakes interminably bound together by canals and streams and fed by innumerable rivulets and brooks, which leave not one inch of ground untouched, unfertilized. The most inaccessible regions are penetrated into, contributing to and receiving the most unexpected treasures from the still waters of her seemingly mild passion."

"Passion," said Betty vehemently. "You mean love, do you not?"

"I mean passion, dear child; for the love of a woman for a man, if it be the genuine feeling and not a spurious one that binds her to him, must contain passion as well as love."

Betty looked at the famous singer in mute horror.

"You are so young, *carissima,*" Madame Hudrazzini continued. "You cannot understand as yet. Your eyes are the eyes of a child. They are clear and cold and pure as rock crystal. The woman nature has not yet softened and subdued them—has not yet lighted them with the inner flame. Because you are so very young, passion seems impure and unchaste to you. Try to look

at it in a different light. Think only of the noble and lofty emotions which a legitimate passion sanely indulged in can engender. When you are a little older you will understand that passion can be either the vilest or the highest thing in life, according to the manner in which we approach it.

"Meanwhile, cultivate your art. Should the man you love be snatched from you by one of life's many disasters, you will not be wholly bankrupt.

"We have philosophized long enough. Mr. Pryce is waiting for you. Introduce him to me."

Richard, as Betty saw on turning, stood not a yard away from them, and she obediently introduced him to Madame Hudrazzini, who was very gracious and sweet with him, and bade him bring Betty to see her.

A little later they made their way out of the Direktor's house. Richard had ordered the taxicab to come back for them, and opening the door of the vehicle, he pushed her into it.

"I am not going to ride," he said. "I am going to walk. You will have to go home alone."

Betty jumped from the taxicab.

"I won't ride home without you, Dicky. Where you go to-night, I go too."

"I want to be alone," he said gruffly. Betty became seriously alarmed. He had never spoken to her roughly before.

"I don't care if you do, Dicky. I'll be as still as a mouse, but where you go, I go."

He looked hard at her, but replied grudgingly:

"Come along, then."

He made no further protest, and she walked with him in silence after he had dismissed the taxicab. Seemingly without direction, they threaded their way through the streets, reaching home within an hour.

Mrs. Presbey was waiting up for them.

"Well?" she inquired.

"Miss Garside was told that her voice is a high-class mechanical toy and I was told that a pianola in a saloon plays with more feeling than myself."

At the recital of this blasphemy, Mrs. Presbey uttered an indignant "Oh!" and was about to burst into a torrent of abusive revilement when Betty, before following Richard upstairs, put her fingers against her lips.

"Good-night," he said roughly.

"Good-night, Dicky."

But Betty did not undress, nor did she open the Davenport. She was certain that sooner or later that night Dicky would come to her for consolation. And though he came at three in the morning, her door would be open to him.

Presently, a little before one, he tapped at the door.

"May I come in?"

She opened the door, and he walked in quietly and sat down on a corner of the Davenport. He looked huddled and broken and old. She could not bear to see his boyish face thus seared and changed, and to hide his face from her eyes, as well as to afford him what consolation she might, she sat down on the arm of the Davenport, and gently, protectingly putting her arms around Richard, drew him against her shoulder. Intuition told her that not through words but only through a caress could she hope to soothe him.

"Betty," he exclaimed suddenly, "it was splendid of you to say what you did to Earlcote."

"I never thought, Dicky, that I was capable of feeling so downright wicked as I did at that moment. I am really sorry I said what I did."

"Why?"

She did not reply. She was so rigidly, inflexibly

honest that she could not think of some innocuous prevarication with which to reply, for the real reason of her regret was the fact, of course, that her outbreak had decided Earlcote to play, thereby establishing his immeasurable superiority over Richard, and through affording Earlcote a chance to treat her generously, had regained for him the good esteem of those present which his harsh treatment of Richard had lost him.

Richard continued: "If you are sorry because he played owing to what you said, you needn't be. I don't regret it. It was a revelation to hear him. Of course a man who can play like that has a right to say what he pleases to a poor bungler like myself."

"Dicky, you are not a bungler."

"You know I am—after hearing that damnable Octoroon. Oh, I beg your pardon, but I want to say it again, that damnable, detestable beast of an Octoroon. God! How I hate him—how I hate him!"

"And so do I," Betty said fervently.

"Until he played I had a vague, sneaking hope that you might be right, that professional jealousy had inspired the unmerciful roast he gave me. But, heavens and earth, *how* he played! I've heard Paderewski, and Hoffman, and Rosenthal, and Joseffy, and d'Albert, and Busonyi—I've heard 'em all, but there is not a single one of them whom he does not eclipse as the sun eclipses the moon. He could almost make one believe in magic."

Betty sat very still for a moment, and again, as earlier in the evening, love made her clairvoyant.

"Dicky," she said, "this is what I saw. The man's soul was revealed plainly in his face while you were playing. I tell you that once or twice, at least, you carried him away, just as he carried us away later on. He is not jealous of you as you are now, dearest—prac-

tically untaught and untrained—but he is jealous of the artist you may develop into with the proper tuition."

Richard would not take this view of it. He talked on and on. He never thought to ask Betty what Earlcote had said to her, or what decision she had reached concerning Europe. It was only on the morrow that he remembered to think of these matters. At the moment he was eaten up with disappointment and injured vanity and fury.

Betty sat there, with Richard in her arms, thinking over the evening's happenings. Chords of whose very existence she had been in ignorance had been whipped into vibrant life that evening. New impressions, ideas and personalities had crowded upon her thick and fast. Madame Hudrazzini's words rang clamorously in her ears. Above everything her love for Richard was rampantly alive in her as never before. And because, as the great singer had said, a woman's passion is inextricably bound up with her holiest and most tender feelings, with everything that is most sacred and divine in her soul and acutest and most delicately balanced in her body, Betty's cheeks began to glow, her eyes to shine with a new and deeper luster, until the rock crystal look of limpid clearness was gone, and they glimmered instead like the velvet petals of a black pansy. Most of all she felt tenderness, infinite and inexpressible, for her Dicky. Her blood sang in her veins like some ineffably sweet song, some song which evaded her ears although it filled her soul. She lost the faculty of precise and accurate thought. She experienced a hazy sensation that it would be sweet not to have to part with Dicky at all that night, that it would be sweet to sleep with his arms about her.

How near to happiness was Richard now! The miracle for which he had prayed was all but performed. A

little well-advised ardor and she would have been his completely. But the golden moment vanished. Plunged in mortification and despair, filled with fury and resentment, he allowed a conjunction of conditions, which might not occur again in a lifetime, to pass without using them. Miserable, utterly wretched, humiliated and shaken, he rose suddenly, and bidding Betty goodnight, went from the room without so much as kissing her.

And Betty—Betty was so innocent that she was ashamed of the unreasoning happiness which was suffusing her, ascribing it to unjustifiable self-love because Earlcote and Madame Hudrazzini had been kind to her; she accused herself of disloyalty, unwarrantable pettiness and egotism because she was capable of feeling happy when her Dick was plunged in despair. She had yet to learn the contradiction of human nature by which there is distilled in a woman's heart the feeling of supreme joy when she is comforting the man she loves for some extraneous sorrow.

## CHAPTER XIII

Before leaving town, Archie Telfer asked to be allowed to send Betty postcards, and hardly a day passed without bringing her two or three choice souvenir postals, each one a little work of art. Sometimes they brought her brief word of his doings, sometimes they conveyed no message except the briefest greeting. Always they were in unimpeachable taste.

The "dog" was taking kindly to "The Sun-God," and Archie's press agent's inventiveness was taxed to the utmost to fabricate adequate stories for the various Sunday papers which besieged him for sensational new material in the career of "Adonis." Of course "the three graces" came in plentifully for their share of the write-ups, nor did the spiciness of their individual existence lose salt in the telling. Betty, who never looked at the popular Sunday papers, was shown one of these articles by Miss Sharpe, who imagined that Betty would read the amazing chronicle through green spectacles. Betty merely glanced over the reportorial confection and, handing it back to Miss Sharpe, said:

"It is rather horrid, isn't it? I don't see how a nice chap like Mr. Telfer could contrive to get himself into such a mess. It must be horribly mortifying for him to see the affair discussed in the papers."

Miss Sharpe looked unutterable things, and winked at Miss Connors, who continued pasting labels in wrappers with an air of stolid scorn.

"Yes, she may be a fool because she doesn't see through him, but she ain't no fool in that she doesn't

give Archie more thought than she does you or me. It is still Richard the Innocent for her—believe me. But does any sane woman refuse postcards or a box of Huyler's or American Beauties? Not on your tintype, Miss Sharpe."

Betty did not show those postcards to Richard. It was an innocent enough deception, if deception there was. Richard had happened to see the first postal, and had gone into a Berseker rage at the impudence of "that cur, that hound," in writing to her.

"Aren't you a bit hard on Archie?" Betty inquired. She remembered that at the Direktor's house Richard had asked Archie to carry a message for her, and she forthwith drew the conclusion that Richard objected to Archie only when he himself was not there to chaperon her.

"Archie!" Richard snorted hotly. "Don't refer to him by his first name. Did I say 'cur'? 'hound'? Well, I would like to qualify that with an expression I cannot use in your presence."

Betty naturally concluded that Richard's attack of fury was due to jealousy, and to avoid intensifying that feeling, allowed the postcards she received in every morning's mail to disappear before Richard strolled over to her desk. She did not reply to any of the cards. That, she reflected, was the beauty of the postcard system—it absolved the stay-at-homes from replying to the tourists.

Earlcote, accompanied by Dushka and Hahdjan, came to the store one morning at half-past eleven. It was on a brisk, clear morning in January that brought the color to everybody else's cheeks, but Earlcote looked just as colorless and gray as on the memorable evening on which Betty had first seen him, and to heighten the livid, leaden, lifeless effect, he had donned a suit of gray that almost

matched the indescribably pale, pasty complexion. His jade-green eyes were the only trace of color about him, for even the scarfpin which he wore in his gray tie was a moonstone set in platinum.

"Well," he said, removing his hat with difficulty and giving it to one of his servants to hold, "how are we this morning?"

Betty had been bracing herself for this meeting. Decency, as well as policy, suggested that she employ ordinary courtesy in whatever social intercourse with Earlcote events might force upon her, and she, who had never remotely thought of using anyone, so inveterate was her repugnance to time-serving, now told herself that for Richard's sake she must be civil to Earlcote, for she still hoped, she knew not by what means, to persuade him to reverse his verdict concerning Richard's playing.

She smiled mechanically in recognition of Earlcote's greeting.

"I am very well, thank you. I trust you are well," she ventured.

Earlcote glanced at her shrewdly.

"How much do my purchases have to amount to in order to entitle me to hear that matchless voice of yours?"

"I'm not busy this morning," Betty said, without meeting Earlcote's eyes, "so, if you wish me to sing some little song for you I shall be glad to do it, even if you make no purchase. Besides," she added, "you are the great Stanley Earlcote and a friend of Mr. Telfer's, and are therefore entitled to additional courtesy."

"Hm! You are treating me very decently to-day. Have you by any chance reconsidered your imbecile decision to refuse my offer?"

"I still hold to the imbecile decision."

Earlcote extended his gloved hand, in which Dushka placed a parcel. He handed this to Betty.

"Will you undo it, please," he said. "It is the score for Gounod's 'Faust.' I have placed a bookmark to indicate 'The Jewel Song.' Please sing it."

The quiet authority of the voice admitted no choice. Betty's heart began jumping with anger, unwarrantably, as she was fair enough to realize.

"I am unfamiliar with the score," she objected. "I have never even tried the opera or that particular song."

"Hum it to yourself before singing it," he said. "It does not matter if you make a mistake in reading the music. I want to hear your voice."

Presently Betty began to sing. Although she was not nervous, she was unwilling, she could not have said why, to have this man hear her sing again. And yet she herself had offered to sing for him, hoping to propitiate him for Richard's sake. When she had finished, he said curtly:

"My judgment was correct. A wonderful voice—like a bell in the upper register. It is mezzo-soprano and can easily be extended in range to become a full soprano. But no emotion, no feeling at all."

Betty flushed angrily.

"You are, to all intents a normal, healthy young woman, and you sing this exquisite bit of feminine music—music so feminine that it must inevitably reach down into every heart with its human appeal—as if it were a hymn to chastity."

"I do not care a rap what you think of my singing or my voice," Betty said, all her good resolutions going to the wall. She closed the book, flung it down on the bench from which she had risen, and turning, faced Earlcote, all her repugnance for the man in the ascendant.

"I hate you, I hate you," she gasped, and even as she

spoke she was aghast at her lack of self-control, frightened at the vehemence she displayed. Earlcote, with the utmost good-nature, inquired:

"Do you happen to realize why you hate me so bitterly?"

"Because you spoiled Dick's future."

"Nonsense. No one can spoil another man's future unless he ruins his health." He made a significant gesture with his hands. "Besides, Richard Pryce has nothing whatever to do with the feeling with which I inspire you, and deep down in your heart you know it." He leaned forward, and when he spoke again he had dropped his voice to a whisper. "You hate me for a reason personal to yourself and myself—personal to yourself, a woman, and personal to myself, a man."

Betty was white with anger.

She demanded: "Do you wish to insinuate that I pretend hatred for you to hide love? Surely you haven't the hardihood to pretend that I would fall in love with such as you?"

Earlcote laughed mirthlessly.

"What a child it is," he said indulgently, "what an untried, foolish, impotent little fledgling." He regarded Betty quizzically. "If you were a mature woman," he continued easily, "suspecting me of so monstrous an egotism, you would have sought to punish me by making me fall in love with you, which would have been a far more cruel thing to do than to utter an imprecation—more cruel, and far less raw."

Betty hung her head.

"As I was saying," Earlcote continued, "the reason of your hatred for me is a reason personal to you and to me. Emotions which are new to you are awakening, and I am the cause of that awakening."

Betty made a Herculean effort to keep from breaking

into another fit of rage. Pressing her folded arms across her bosom, with her characteristic gesture, she said:

"I do not want to be rude to you again, Mr. Earlcote—but please, please don't say such things to me."

Earlcote ignored her interpolation completely.

"Contrary to general belief, sex may be active in a hatred, in a repugnance, quite as much as in an attraction, in a love. But such a repugnance is much rarer than a great love. In isolated cases only will such a repugnance assume notable proportions. This, my dear Miss Garside, is your case in regard to myself."

Betty looked at her tormentor helplessly.

"It is true I hate you as I never imagined I could hate anyone," she said, "but I deny that the feeling is other than a hatred I might feel for a woman. Any other supposition is absurd."

"Why? If you ascribe to loathing a purely spiritual basis you make it a more magnificent and noble thing than love. Besides, you know as well as I do that no woman would inspire in you precisely the feeling I arouse in you. The dominion exerted by sex is incalculable, far-reaching, mysterious, and not one of us can escape from it. Hereafter, unless you wilfully oppose yourself to the new factor in your life, your singing will change, your voice will become an emotional voice, not a mere musical instrument."

"I will never sing for you again."

"Yes, you will, quite often, I am sure. For by and by, you know, I am going to teach you."

Betty felt the cold perspiration stand on her brow. Earlcote's quiet tone of conviction was uncanny. At the moment she feared him even more than she hated him.

"Sex is the alpha and omega of all art," he resumed. "True greatness of conception and execution or inter-

pretation can be achieved only by that man or woman in whom sex is normally and sanely developed. Sex gives us many gifts, the gift of understanding, of sympathy, of unselfishness, of sin."

"And you call sin a gift?" Betty was aghast, baffled; yet in spite of herself she was intensely interested.

"Yes, one of the greatest of all gifts. The perfect man, the impeccable woman never quicken with sweet sympathy. That is why I call sin a great gift. It teaches us the weakness and insignificance inherent in all, and it acquaints us with the splendor, the magnificence that dwells in every soul. Some few rare natures, of imaginative bent, can fathom the misery of toppling into the abyss without actually plunging into it, but most of us, phlegmatic and uninspired, must knock our ribs and scratch our knees and stub our toes and skin our elbows by an actual tumble into the great gulf before we can fully comprehend and compassionate those who are unhappy through a fault of their own."

"At this moment I do not hate you," Betty said impulsively.

"That in no way invalidates my theory," Earlcote retorted, smiling. "There are moments when we do not love those whom we love. Love and loathing—what are they but the convex and concave surface of sex? Take a jug, a cup, a vase. Where there is a convex side, there is a concave side also. Any other condition is unthinkable."

"You are very brilliant," Betty said grudgingly.

Earlcote ignored the compliment and continued:

"The uses of sin are twofold. The individual use, to teach us and broaden us and make us more fit in every way, if only through the long, hard upward struggle that succeeds sin; and its social use—to give virtue an opportunity for active service."

Here, no matter how faulty Earlcote's theory, was offered an explanation of the problem which Richard had been unable to expound for Betty.

"Tannhaeuser," she said quickly, her tone a cross between a question and an ejaculation.

"Exactly," Earlcote took her up. "Tannhaeuser is one of the most wonderful works of art ever produced because it touches the vital things of life; the two currents,—goodness, evil subsist side by side. They overlap and interweave, but never blend. Each of us is now in one stream, now in the other, for absolute goodness is as fictitious a quantity as absolute evil. Neither can conquer, neither can be vanquished, for if one would be obliterated, the other would necessarily cease to exist, for what conception could we form of goodness if its antithesis were not there to serve as its measure?"

"And that is why Tannhaeuser is greater than Elisabeth herself. Having sinned, he had the strength to recross to the other current. That argues more strength than to pursue the passive tenor of a noble life because temptation has never beckoned."

"I have always disliked to think of sex at all," said Betty musingly.

"There is no reason why you should. Sex is the yeast that leavens the entire inert mass of our human paste. Without it there would be no progress, no art—nothing.

"Good-by," he said, and extended his gloved hand tentatively. "Will you shake hands with me to-day? See, I have not removed my gloves in order to spare you the sight of my hands."

Conquering her aversion, Betty put her hand into his. Even through the heavy dogskin glove she could feel the mutilations—conspicuous knuckles and gnarled fin-

gers. Her face was pale and drawn as she quickly withdrew her hand from his.

"I met Madame Hudrazzini the other day," Earlcote said. "She asked for you. She promised to bring you and the whipper-snapper down to Earlcote Manor some day in her car. Will you come?"

"Thank you, yes," said Betty, thinking that at Earlcote's house she might have a better opportunity to plead for Richard than anywhere else.

"When are you at leisure?"

"Wednesday afternoon."

'And Richard Pryce?"

"Richard takes Friday afternoons off, but if we are not too busy he may be able to take the same afternoon as myself."

"I see. When you visit me, I will play you some Hungarian gypsy music. I warrant you have never heard anything like it before. I am going to enchant you with my playing, and my aviary, and my Aladdin's Orchard, and by and by you will be quite content to be my pupil."

Betty sat very still for a good quarter of an hour after Earlcote was gone. Such a medley of feelings swept over her that she felt quite unequal to the task of analyzing or classifying them. Repugnant he was to her—horribly so, and she was fair enough to admit that since this repugnance was a physical sensation, it might have its origin in the feeling he named. The thought was so completely new to her that she examined it carefully from every viewpoint and every perspective. She deeply resented the fact that this gargoyle-faced man should be able to arouse in her any sensation whatever. She thought of Richard, whom she loved so devotedly. Why, if what Earlcote said was true, did Richard lack the power to awaken her dormant womanhood? For the

first time in her life she desired to understand the meaning of passion; she blushed; she was ashamed of the wish; it seemed impure to her; she sought to exonerate herself in her own eyes by saying that the wish arose merely out of the knowledge that Earlcote, whom she hated, exerted a power over her which Richard, whom she loved, lacked.

Then she remembered Madame Hudrazzini's impassioned words, the reverence with which she had spoken of the stronger tie, the deeper bond between man and woman. And for the first time, too, the thought came to Betty that after all her attitude toward the mystery of life, toward the deeper significance of sex, might be all wrong. She remembered her mother's attitude. It had seemed clear once—but now, though she remembered her mother's words distinctly, it seemed blurred and indistinct. One thing was clear. As she, Betty, had rejected her mother's theory that affection was quite indispensable in marriage, there was no earthly reason why she should not also reject her mother's attitude toward marriage—the aversion which her mother had tacitly allowed her daughter to believe she felt. So intensely had Earlcote stimulated her mind that for the first time the thought came to her that her mother's attitude might have been hypocritical. She remembered the curious sensation of tenderness, of happiness which had come to her the evening of Earlcote's verdict when she held Richard in her arms. She wondered whether at that moment she had not stood upon the threshold of a fuller life.

At that moment a great resolve was born in Betty's soul. Henceforth she would try to understand, to feel, and failing, she would some day screw up her courage and pretend to Dicky that the change which he had so ardently desired had actually occurred in her feeling

for him. Perhaps, if she pretended hard enough, the change would ultimately occur.

Earlcote's invitation came the very next day. It was written on note paper as thick as blotting paper, and it was rough to look at but smooth to the touch, and the note was enclosed in a double envelope. The flap of the envelope bore the Tiffany imprint.

A mild, agreeable excitement took possession of Betty and lasted through the four days that intervened between the arrival of Earlcote's invitation and Wednesday afternoon, the day on which Betty, chaperoned by Madame Hudrazzini, was to visit Earlcote Manor. Richard refused absolutely to accompany them. He seemed hurt that Betty should contemplate visiting Earlcote, but when she attempted to explain why she was going, he gently but firmly declined to listen. Betty did not insist upon explaining. She feared that if Richard knew the real reason of her visit, he would interfere with her going.

Earlcote Manor had been written about to repletion by the entire New York press, and Betty, in some small measure, was prepared for its wonders.

Overlooking Long Island Sound, the enormous estate, covering some four hundred acres, was laid out with a view of securing a picturesque and spacious, rather than a garden effect. Shrubs and flowers were all of the large, ornamental type, hydrangeas, rose bushes, peonies, hardy azaleas, gladiolii, cannas, these in summer, filled the gardens with a riot of color. But the real glory of Earlcote Manor were its buildings, all of which were modeled upon some famous Indian prototype. The Manor House was a modification of the architecture of the Jasmine Tower, of Agra Fort, used as a zenana by one of the moguls. Seen at high noon, flooded by the white sunlight of winter, itself white as the snow-robed

landscape from which it rose when Betty first glimpsed it, with its three rows of delicately fashioned columns rising plateau-wise one above the other, and separated by architraves and lattice work as intricate and lace-like in design as filigree work, the building seemed almost as unsubstantial as the snow itself—seemed part of a dream landscape wrought by fairies out of the snow to while away the tedium of a mid-winter vigil.

A boat-house, rising from the water some hundred feet from the shore, was modeled in imitation of the Golden Temple of Amritsar, the blue water back of it, and the blue canopy of sky above, showing like a piece of indigo satin in the rear of the colonnades of the Manor House. It made the snow-laden landscape an exquisite symphony in blue and white and gold.

Madame Hudrazzini and Betty were admitted by a Hindu servant, who led them through an interminable corridor finished in marvelous arabesques and scroll work, and furnished with divans, Persian and Arabian rugs, grinning idols and burning censers. Finally they came into an enormous apartment surmounted by a glass dome. It was the interior of Earlcote's famous aviary, the exterior of which was built in exact imitation of the Taj Mahal, the tomb of Arjamand, the consort of Shah Jahan.

Betty and Madame Hudrazzini stood still in bewilderment, upon entering the aviary. It was more like a garden than a habitat for birds. A bronze fountain in the center poured water, perfumed with sandalwood, into a white marble basin, on the steps of which sat two Arab boys playing mandolins. They were naked save for a loin cloth, and wore anklets and bracelets of heavy gold, and their bodies, anointed with oil, glistened as if sculptured out of agate. Pink water lilies floated on the bosom of the fountain, wonderful hand-woven rugs cov-

ered the inlaid marble floor, wonderful tapestries hung from balustrades of lace-like design. Enormous cages containing gaily colored parrots and green and white cockatoos, swung high above the visitors' heads. A flamingo laved its pink legs in the water near the floating lilies.

Out of all this dazzling mass of color Earlcote detached his colorless self and came forward with outstretched hand to greet his visitors. Betty was grateful that he wore gloves, and as she shook hands with him she noticed that as a fob he wore a gem different from anything she had ever seen, and which, from Archie's description, she guessed was the Kasi-Nook, the famous black opal.

Madame Hudrazzini insisted on strolling about to look at everything. Earlcote called a Hindu to show her about, pleading fatigue as an excuse for himself for not accompanying her, and asking that Betty keep him company until Madame Hudrazzini's return.

Betty noticed that Earlcote gave all instructions through Dushka or Hahdjan, the deaf-mutes, who stood behind his chair, and when Earlcote turned his head, one of the two darted forward. Earlcote's lips moved, but he did not speak. Immediately the Hindu, making an obeisance, walked away to summon the servant whom Earlcote had designated as a guide for Madame Hudrazzini. There was something uncanny in these silent commands of Earlcote and their incredibly swift execution. Who but Earlcote, thought Betty, would have conceived the idea of not pronouncing the words which he wished his deaf-mutes to read from his lips. The incident, trifling as it was, heightened the sense of weird unreality which was creeping over Betty.

When they were alone, seated on a marble bench in front of a marble table, Earlcote said:

"Well, Miss Garside, how do you like my enchanted palace?"

"It is wonderful."

"Yes, but it has one drawback. The birds, being tropical, do not sing. Now what I need, what I want and what I desire above everything is a song-bird, a live, human song-bird to make music for me."

He leaned his elbows on the table and brought his face close to Betty's. The girl's blood seemed to congeal in her veins as the terrible green eyes approached her own so narrowly, but she gave no outward sign of perturbation.

"You are gaining in self-control," said Earlcote, "or is the aversion for me wearing away?"

"Please, please, Mr. Earlcote," Betty implored.

"Oh, very well. What I long for now, as I was saying, is a human song-bird whom I could teach."

Betty again said "Please, please," rather asininely.

"Well, then, if I am not to speak about that either, tell me about the whipper—no, that word also is prohibited. I shall have to make a list of what I may and of what I may not speak of in your presence. Tell me about the young man whom you love so devotedly."

"What am I to tell?"

"Didn't you come here, Miss Betty, for the express purpose of discussing him with me?"

Betty blushed furiously.

"You came here, I think, to plead with me for your Richard."

"Well, yes, I did."

"You love him, but you do not love him passionately."

"Certainly not. I have told you before that I do not love him passionately."

Earlcote laughed.

"My dear young lady," he said, "you had better be-

ware. If you treat your Richard too frigidly he will some day go off and marry someone else. Why, you carry your obstinate self-deception so far that you pronounce the very word 'passion' as if your mouth were sprinkled with cayenne pepper, and it were agony to speak. You are a foolish, silly, absurd little girl. You pride yourself upon the spiritual tie that binds you to your Richard. Spiritual ties! As well tie up a criminal's hands with ribbons of smoke as expect to bind a man and a woman together by spiritual ties only. We are of the earth, earthy, and we cannot escape from our earthy heritage. 'Blood is thicker than water,' the old adage says. Perhaps that offends you also by its coarseness. If not, it is because you lack the faculty for coherent and logical thought. There could exist no blood relationship whatever—not the tender bonds uniting sister and sister, the strong tie which unites brother and brother, if it were not for the exercise of this particular function of Nature."

Betty's self-possession gave way. She made no effort to fence with this remorseless intellectual machine, clanging out its opinions in concise, metallic terms.

"I cannot help it," she said supinely. "I have tried to understand—I have tried to overcome the shrinking—but I do not succeed."

"That is the first sensible thing I have heard you say on the subject."

Earlcote leaned back in his chair and gazed at her meditatively. "You will learn," he said. "There is no doubt but that you will learn, and you will some day be a great, no, I will make no predictions as they only annoy you."

His eyes, fixed upon Betty, scrutinized her at leisure. Without moving, without speaking, without as much as a quiver of lip or eyelid, he sat and looked at her with

his green cat's eyes, and Betty, shrinking away from that gaze, felt herself grow limp as a rag or flaccid as jelly. All her aversion, which she had heroically contrived to keep under control, surged up in her. She had the sensation that Earlcote was a huge cat and she a mouse with which he was playing.

With a terrible effort of the will she dismissed the morbid fancy. She remembered that she was leagues from the subject which she had come to discuss. She came back to it clumsily.

"To return to Richard," she said, "I am sure that his career is the one thing that will make for his happiness. Dear Mr. Earlcote, won't you be nice and recommend him?"

"*Dear* Mr. Earlcote—assuredly, that word addressed to me must have made you suffer," Earlcote repeated almost blithely. "*Dear* Mr. Earlcote."

Betty bit her lip.

"I am trying, honestly trying, Mr. Earlcote, to overcome my childish dislike for you."

Earlcote bent forward quickly and touched Betty's arm with his gloved hand. Unconsciously she shrank back from his touch.

"That is how you will overcome your aversion—because it is not a childish one, as I told you the other day. You cannot help yourself. It flatters me quite as much as if you had fallen in love with me."

"Mr. Earlcote, I beg of you, let us speak of Richard for a little while."

"Very well."

"I implore you once more to reverse your opinion. You can do it easily enough."

"How? I cannot give myself the lie."

"You might say that, after hearing him play again, his playing seemed very much better to you."

"I thought you were honest, Miss Betty? And here you are asking me to do an extremely dishonest thing."

"No, I'm not." Betty spoke quietly. A significant undercurrent in her tone and manner made Earlcote ask sharply:

"What do you mean?"

Betty's sweet grave face became very white. She said bravely:

"You know as well as I do if you were to say that it would be merely telling them your true opinion of Dicky's playing."

"Surely you are not trying to revive the silly notion that I am professionally jealous of Richard now that you have heard me *play* the piece that he had previously murdered?"

"It is not a silly notion. You are not jealous of him as he is now—of course not—but you fear him as a rival in the future. You want to go down to history as the great pianist of all ages—and you know that Richard, if he had a fair chance, would be your close second, perhaps your equal."

Earlcote's gray face grew more cadaverous. He was furious that this slip of a girl, this silly chit of a girl, whom he would not have considered worth a moment's notice if it were not for the incomparable voice that lodged in her throat, should have read his inmost thoughts so perfectly. He would have liked to crush her brutally, to get rid of her, to send her about her business. But there was her voice, the voice which he desired and coveted with a passion and enthusiasm he had not felt since his body had been wrecked, making it impossible for him to express himself through his own medium. He controlled himself, and said diffidently:

"Your infatuation for your Richard blinds your judg-

ment, just as it allows you to stoop to conduct for which you would otherwise despise yourself."

"What do you mean? What conduct? What have I done?"

"You are trying to make use of one of your friends—you are trying to use me."

"In the first place," Betty replied vigorously, chin high in air, "I am not trying to use you. I am trying to get you to be just instead of unjust; in the second place, if I were trying to use you, it would not be a friend whom I wanted to use. One feels no dislike for one's friends, I think."

Earlcote's thin lips became taut and straight until they formed a barely perceptible line in the hideous face.

"If we are not friends, there is no reason why we should not drive a bargain with each other, is there?"

"None."

"Very well. Now tell me, what would you be willing to suffer for your Richard's sake."

"Anything in the wide world."

Earlcote took a wallet from his pocket, and counted out five one-thousand dollar bills.

"Would that cover Richard's expenses abroad for three years?"

"It certainly would. But I do not want *your* money, Mr. Earlcote."

"I may give you a chance to earn it."

He turned his head, his lips moved. Dushka in obedience to the silent command, ran off with the stealthy, gliding movements of a tiger, returning a minute later with a pair of scissors. Again Earlcote's lips moved, and Dushka cut the five one-thousand dollar bills in half, one by one. Then he withdrew.

Earlcote gathered up one set of these mutilated bills; the other set of halves he pushed toward Betty.

"The set in my pocket," he said, "which pasted to the set which are yours, will place five thousand dollars at your disposal. They will be handed to you by me if you will consent to call for them here at midnight."

Betty drew back aghast. Her black eyes glimmered like burning coals.

"How dare you?" she said in a low, indignant voice, "How dare you offer me such an insult?"

"There you are. You tell me you are willing to endure 'anything in the world' for your Richard," he imitated the semi-pathetic, semi-strenuous inflection of a woman's voice. "I make you a proposition, a harmless, fair business proposition, and you immediately flare up, and say 'How dare you insult me like that?' The inconvenience to which my proposition would have put you is very slight, as you will admit."

"It is not a case of inconvenience, it is a case of wrong-doing," Betty flung back indignantly. "I would certainly not do anything wrong, not even for Richard's sake."

Earlcote laughed.

"Poor love," he said, "if it weighs and measures with Puritanical drams and grains to ascertain whether service be service only or sin as well. You thought, did you, of poor Ophelia's words:

*'Went in a maid that out a maid*
*Never departed more.'*

You imputed motives of that sort to me, didn't you, you little white thing? But, if you will recollect, I did not say so."

"If you didn't mean that, what did you mean?"

Betty's face was crimson. She was on the verge of tears—tears of mortification and shame.

"Ah, there you are. Perhaps, as in Monna Vanna, I would have asked you to sit all through the night with me, robed only in a mantle. Perhaps I would have thought that the torture of anticipating that you would be expected to submit yourself to my will would be sufficient suffering to earn your five thousand dollars. Then again—perhaps I didn't think that. Will you test me?"

"Certainly not."

Earlcote laughed.

"Well—keep the mutilated set of five one-thousand dollar bills. If you ever wish the other set of halves, telephone me that you are coming. I will understand, and expect you that same evening. And I promise you, on my honor as a gentleman, that whatever my intentions may be, if, at the last moment, you desire to leave my house with the one set of halves only in your pocket, you shall be as free to go as you were to come, unmolested, unharmed."

"You are detestable," said Betty, impetuously. Rising, she pushed the five half bills across the table to Earlcote.

"If you do not take your set with you, Miss Betty, I shall think that you are afraid of trusting yourself with them—afraid of the temptation, afraid of familiarizing yourself with temptation."

Betty gave him a look of infinite scorn. She swept the vast apartment with her glances. Again she experienced the curious accession of a different personality. Again she felt older, more experienced, more mature, a woman capable of dealing with the vexatious situation which confronted her.

"I will go and meet Madame Hudrazzini," she said. "I think I will not impose on your hospitality any longer."

Earlcote struggled from his chair. Seriously alarmed, he protested:

"My dear Miss Garside—I apologize, I do indeed. Perhaps we can make a different bargain, a bargain which will be acceptable to you."

Betty, her back turned to him, remained immovable. Earlcote, leaning heavily on the table, brought his face forward so far that it almost touched her shoulder, and leering hideously, continued:

"Supposing—just supposing I were to offer you this sum of money if you in return will consent to be my pupil?"

Betty turned and faced him. Her serenity, the security and authority with which she found herself prepared to summarily handle the situation filled her with an aloof, detached amazement. She seemed to be spectator as well as actor in the little comedy which was in process of enactment. The thought flashed across her mind that from Earlcote himself she was drawing some of the strength, the resourcefulness, the wariness with which she miraculously found herself invested.

"You should have thought to offer that bargain first," she said. "You can hardly expect me to consider any proposition of yours after the deadly affront you offered me."

Earlcote regarded her quizzically. His crafty eyes changed from green to a gray so deep that they were almost black.

"Perceive, if you please, that just now I made no definite offer—I merely postulated the possibility of such an offer. You might have been ready to pronounce acceptable a bargain which, after all, I would not have been ready to make."

"Why did you try to get my opinion of it, then?"

"So I could make up my mind at leisure as to whether that particular exchange was worth my while."

"How worth your while?"

"Whether it was worth putting down five thousand dollars for the pleasure of enrolling you as a free pupil."

"Yet you were willing to put down five thousand dollars for the pleasure of a night's conversation with me."

Astounded, a little frightened at her own fluency of thought and facility of speech in giving this twist to Earlcote's insulting proposition, Betty began tapping the table with her fingers. In spite of the harassing and mortifying position in which she found herself, she was surprised to find that she was experiencing something akin to pleasure in the maturity of thought and manner which she was displaying.

Earlcote looked at her keenly for a moment before replying.

"Perhaps," he said slowly, "I made you the first proposition as a bona fide and not as a tentative proposition because I was absolutely sure that you would not stoop to it."

Automatically, Betty's fingers stopped their tapping. The chaste, pale face became very still. The lustrous, penetrating black eyes with their glint of light in the pupils lay in her head like burning coals. She was thinking rapidly and economically, wasting no time in fruitless discursiveness. Facts that dovetailed, statements that conflicted, presented themselves to her.

"You are adroit of speech, Mr. Earlcote. But you are forgetting an important point. In offering me the affront which you term your 'first proposition' and which you now pretend to have known I would not abase myself to accept, you practically destroyed five thousand dollars."

"I have only to paste them together again."

"But I might have taken your dare and walked off

with one set of halves. Then you would have been five thousand dollars out of pocket, without getting anything in return."

"I was certain you would not take my dare."

Betty looked hard at Earlcote. Before her, on the table, still lay the one set of half bills. Deliberately, her lips wearing a semi-amused, semi-mischievous smile, she swept them into her purse.

"I did not think, Miss Garside, that you would do so daring a thing. It is daring, you know."

"I shall be glad to return them to you the day my Richard receives the scholarship from the Musical Progress League. I leave it to your ingenuity to think of ways and means."

Earlcote pretended to become indignant. Secretly he was more entertained than he had been in years. He had underrated this chit of a girl, and he now hoped to see more of her. She amused him. Also he was a a good sportsman and the fact that the game was going against him, lent zest to it.

"I, too, have my honor," he protested. "As I told you before, I cannot give myself the lie."

"Honor—nonsense. It is simply this Mr. Earlcote: You are going to decide within the next week what you want more, five thousand dollars or the spoiling of Richard's future, so far as it lies in your power to spoil it."

"I think you must be a paranoic."

"What's that?"

"Paranoia is the terrible form of insanity that begins by imagining that someone is persecuting us. In you it takes the form of an ineradicable belief that I am hounding your adored and adoring Richard. If you don't look out, you will end in a lunatic asylum."

Betty was greatly amused. She was so amused that she threw back her head, venting peal after peal of ex-

quisite laughter, that ripple from her throat with a wealth of euphony. It was irresistibly contagious. Earlcote's face was puckered into a smile which had lost every trace of sourness or a sneer.

Because there was more to this girl than he had imagined, he made another desperate effort to gain his point.

"Look here, if I arranged for the scholarship, would you be willing to let me teach you?"

"Evidently you are trying to make up your mind which you want more—to block Richard's career or secure my voice. I will consider no tentative offers. But tell me, Mr. Earlcote, why are you so anxious about my voice? I fail to comprehend your motives in that particular, I confess."

"Can't you imagine what it means for a man of my temperament and musicianship to be suddenly deprived of an outlet for my feelings? To the positive pain of deprivation is added the negative pain of boredom. I am bored to death. I do not know how to pass the time of day since I am unable to play. Day after day I sit reading the scores of operas and symphonies and concertos—of mazurkas and nocturnes and barcaroles, the most insignificant of which, were I to play it, would mean exquisite torture for me. I came back to the United States, hoping that a great specialist of whom I heard while abroad, might be able to restore my spine and arms to usefulness. My hopes were disappointed. As long as I live, when I play, if I play, I must expiate for doing so with inconceivable suffering."

"And what has my voice to do with all this?" Betty told herself that it was monstrous that she could not feel compassion untinctured by aversion for Earlcote. What she felt for him was the repugnance she would have felt for a wounded animal, a bear or a coyote—always repulsive, but doubly repulsive when seen in its death throes.

"You have everything to do with it, Miss Garside. I cannot use my hands, but I can use my brain, and using my brain with your throat as my instrument, I will play on your voice as I formerly played on a piano. It will give me something to do to teach you. It will help pass the endless, weary, memory-haunted hours."

"Nevertheless, I will never be your pupil."

"You will. Kismet—you will."

Madame Hudrazzini was approaching, gesticulating and waving a branch of purple flowers which Betty had never seen before.

"You're not going to make a scene of any sort, are you?" Earlcote asked anxiously.

"No, I am going to say nothing of what has happened. But please understand, Mr. Earlcote, I refrain from 'making a scene' as you call it, not on your account, but on Madame Hudrazzini's, who, since she is acting as my chaperone, would be horribly mortified to think I had been subjected to any unpleasantness through her brief absence."

"See, *carissima,*" said the great soprano, "this is a bougainvillea, a tropical flower. Is it not lovely?"

Earlcote rose from his chair.

"I have promised to play for you ladies," he said, "I will play now."

He played some Hungarian dances, wild gypsy music, whose constant ceaseless changes of rhythm, tempo and accentuation irritated nerves, not accustomed to such truceless syncopation, almost to the breaking point. Betty's imagination was on fire, her blood seemed changed into a myriad tiny hammers that tapped against brain and heart and throat.

After that they ate the most delicious confections Betty had ever tasted, under a palm tree which she suddenly discovered was carved out of green and brown

jade. The pink-legged flamingo came and ate tidbits out of Earlcote's hand, and suddenly a troup of Indian dancing girls, all glistening brown limbs and tinkling spangles and jewels large as hen's eggs and fluttering veils, appeared in the quadrangle on the other side of the pool.

Then, Earlcote took it into his head to show them photographs of himself taken before he had become crippled. His pictures showed him to have had a tall, well-knit athletic figure and a shapely prepossessing head as far as features were concerned, but looking at the pictures made it clear to Betty that her invincible repugnance for Earlcote was not for Earlcote the cripple so much as for Earlcote the man. She realized that he was perfectly right in his diagnosis of her aversion.

Finally, an hour later, Betty and Madame Hudrazzini were speeding Manhattan-ward in the great singer's automobile.

"Like an Arabian night, eh?" asked Madame Hudrazzini.

"To me it seems as if I had escaped from the house of an ogre who eats little children, strayed from home."

"I think this ogre means to be very good to one little child, if the little child will only let him. Here we are—good-by, my dear, and come to see me very soon at my new apartments. I am in every evening at seven." She bent forward and kissed Betty. "If I can ever do anything for you, anything in the wide world—come to me: I am your friend—always."

## CHAPTER XIV

After the departure of his guests, Earlcote remained seated for a few moments, eyes closed, as if deep in thought. Then, turning his head, his lips moved in a silent command which was read by the Hindu attendant.

Stepping noiselessly across the vast apartment, and pushing aside a crimson hibiscus vine, the Hindu turned the knob of a lattice-work door which was completely hidden by the foliage. The chamber into which the door opened was dark, and out of it stepped a young lady who walked briskly out into the courtyard of the aviary. It was Katarina della Florenzia, alias Kitty Florence. She tripped lightly across the floor to Earlcote.

"'Pon my word, Earlcote—I thought you would keep me penned up in there till doomsday. What do you mean by allowing me to cool my heels in a musty, stuffy stable loft like that so long? I couldn't even understand a syllable of what you and the girl were saying. And your pantomimes were not wholly expressive. One thing is sure. The lady does not love you. And I do not love her."

"No doubt. She is everything that you are not. She is virtuous, pure-minded, chaste. Her voice is exquisite and she is so single-minded that she cannot be double-faced, for the sake of her single-minded devotion, even with an enemy."

"Look here, Earlcote, don't run away with the idea that you can verbally turkey-trot with me. If you want me to render you this service, whatever it is, you will have to quarantine your tongue."

Earlcote made her a mock heroic bow.

"I am forgetting to be hospitable," he said. "Will you have a plate of ice-cream?"

"Thanks, no—I have taken the pledge. Carbo-hydrates are so fattening."

"A glass of Benedictine or wine of cocoa? Come now, a cordial?"

"I drink nothing but crême de menthe or champagne."

Earlcote gave the instructions to Dushka in the usual way, and Kitty arched her pretty brows in surprise as she saw Dushka walk away and return with the crême de menthe without having received any oral order.

"Why didn't you have the young man here so I could look him over, as you agreed to do? Really, I'm rippin' mad at having been mewed up in that dungeon."

"You saw him the other evening at the Direktor's."

"Heavens—I saw four unfortunate young puppies—how am I to know which particular one is the man?"

Earlcote drew a newspaper clipping from his pocket, which reproduced Richard's picture, printed by the *Musical Gazette* at the time Richard had received the appointment to illustrate the musical lectures of the League.

Kitty took it up and looked at the picture disdainfully. Her disdain changed to approval.

"A nice-looking boy," she said. "Precisely what do you want me to do?"

"Briefly—I want you, you pretty little vampire—to lure Richard away from his Betty."

"Better not call me a vampire. Better sugar-coat this job all you can, if you want me to undertake it, or I'll drop it like a hot cake."

"Does the task appear to you to be very difficult?"

"Difficult?" Kitty laughed harshly. "You men are all alike," she said contemptuously. "No matter how much

a man loves a woman, if another woman offers him the sweetmeats all men desire, he doesn't refuse them."

" 'Sweet-meats' is good," said Earlcote, with unction.

Kitty luxuriantly sipped the crême de menthe which Dushka had brought her.

"Aint it funny what a difference just a little Irish iceberg makes," she hummed. "The green stuff always makes me see the world through rosy glasses. How much is there in this job for me?"

Earlcote pushed a tiny bag across the table, and Kitty opened it with fingers trembling with greed, awkwardly spilling the contents upon the table. A large blue diamond, and several smaller yellow diamonds, pattered about the table, like peas. Earlcote caught one of them in his hand, as it was about to roll to the floor.

"Look here," Kitty asked with sudden suspicion, "is all this junk real? Or are they just chips of glass?"

"I always play fairly, Miss Firebrand. They are real —right from the treasure chamber of the Gaekwar of Hajaputani."

"Well, it's a jolly lot of sparklers you are offering me." Kitty had laid the stones one by one upon her arm lengthwise. To keep them from falling off, she pressed them firmly into her white flesh with pretty affection. "Jim-dandies, every one of them. You must be mighty keen about this business or you wouldn't be planking down enough hardware to treat every chorus girl in the old burg to a small hot bird and Tiffany water in Lobster Square for a year. Now, would you?"

"It is possible that I overestimated your price."

"Oh, I rake in all I can, when and where I can—believe me—but. . . ." The pretty face darkened. "Look here, Earlcote," she spoke imperiously. "Before I start on this job I want to know all about it, I want to know what's what, I want to know all about the game. What

is it? If you want the engagement to this boy broken so you can get your talons on the girl, I'm not with you on the deal. On the level, is that your game?"

"On the level," Earlcote pronounced the slang gingerly, "it is not."

"You will have to tell me *what* it is very plainly," Kitty pursued remorselessly. "I am a bad egg, I am, as you hinted so delicately before, and I do not like the girl because—well, because I don't. But there are a few uninfected spots left in my moral make-up, and if I thought you wanted to try monkeyshines of any sort—hypnotic or otherwise, upon the girl, I wouldn't touch this proposition with a ten-foot pole."

"Calm yourself, Miss Morality. I am not in love with the little girl. I want to teach her to sing, and the engagement has got to be broken before I can arouse her ambition."

"Is her voice really so beautiful?"

"Marvelous." Earlcote, astute observer of men and women, noted the ring of envy in Kitty's voice. The Kittys of this world pride themselves upon their coldbloodedness, when in reality the passions that sway womankind—vanity, jealousy, envy—lie so near the surface that it needs no Machiavelli to manipulate them. Earlcote was not slow to take his cue. He praised Betty's voice extravagantly, piled adjective upon adjective, metaphor upon metaphor, superlative upon superlative. At the end of two minutes Kitty interrupted him.

"You gush like a geyser. Guess my lady can look out for herself, and I hope to own the sparklers within a month."

"And you'll make the most of the slight resemblance that exists between you and Miss Garside, won't you?"

"Oh, I'll make myself up to look the part, don't you fret." Kitty swept the gems into the bag as one sweeps

bread crumbs from a table, and then tossed the bag across the table to Earlcote. Suddenly, frowning with interest, her eyes narrowed to scrutinize more readily the object that was interesting her.

"What's the stone in your fob?" she asked. "I've never seen anything like it before."

"It's the Kasi-Nook."

"The Black Opal with the hoodoo reputation?"

"The same."

"I say," Kitty tapped Earlcote's sleeve confidentially, "the sparklers aren't in it with that thing like the face of a summer night's sky. I'll take it in pay, instead of the other glass."

"No, you don't. I don't part with the Kasi-Nook."

"Very well, then find someone else to pull off this trick for you."

"Look here, Miss della Florenzia," Earlcote said, cajolingly, "it wouldn't be right for me to give you this hoodoo gem. It would bring you ill-luck."

"I'm not superstitious."

"Superstitious or not superstitious, this gem has been the cause of untold tragedies."

"Then I should think you would be only too glad to get rid of it."

"It brings ill-luck only when come by dishonestly.

*"Honestly come by*
*Fortune and joy,*
*And health it will buy.*
*Dishonestly come by,*
*Health, wealth and joy*
*It will surely destroy.*

"It was given to me by the Gaekwar, in hopes it would bring me some good fortune to compensate for the terrible disaster which had befallen me at his court."

"Well, I like your nerve! Am I not earning it? And if you earn something, you come by it honestly, don't you? I'm in earnest about this, Earlcote."

She began buttoning her gloves, pulled her furs closer about her shoulders and regarded Earlcote menacingly. Earlcote, seeing her determined, haggled a while longer, and then said brusquely,

"Oh, very well, have you own way. By the by, there is a question I would like to ask you. Can you speak English, or only slang?"

Kitty laughed goodnaturedly.

"Sure thing, I can hand out the high-brow slush as well as anybody, but no sane New Yorker returning to the old burg from the European Hinterland would think of speaking anything but the vernacular of the home tepee. So let's get down to hard-pan. Trot out some hard-hearted facts. How and where do I meet our Joseph?"

Earlcote's lips compressed themselves into an unbelievably thin line.

"Sit down," he said, "and I will tell you."

## CHAPTER XV.

It was only when Betty reached home that she remembered the set of cut bank bills which she had taken up from the table. She had meant to return them to Earlcote before leaving. Covered with shame and confusion she sat down in the center of the Davenport. Why had she allowed a silly spirit of bravado to usurp her better judgment? What if burglars were to get into the room that night and steal them? If she was unable to return them to Earlcote, on demand, or without, was she herself any better than a thief?

She propounded to herself a series of similarly soothing questions, with the result that she was almost feverish with fear by dinner time. She dared not return them by messenger for fear the messenger might lose them or be robbed. She did not know where to hide them at night. Finally she telephoned a telegram to be sent to Earlcote. Her message ran:

"Will you be in town to-morrow? If so, where can I see you?"

She flattered herself that the message was so worded as to convey nothing of her ulterior motive in wishing to see Earlcote. An hour later she received an answer:

"If you insist on returning articles of value now shall ascribe conduct to fear. If determined, appoint hour and place and I will be at hand. EARLCOTE."

Betty sent no answer to this. She was mortally afraid of Earlcote, and of keeping the mutilated bills, but she was still more afraid of letting him know that she was afraid.

She went to her room, to devise a place of safekeeping for the wretched things. Finally she put them in a small chamois bag in which her mother had carried money in traveling, and this bag she suspended about her neck from a loop of tape.

Then, although it was only eight thirty, and she was not in the least sleepy, she opened her Davenport and went to bed. Shivering, not with cold but with nervousness, she pulled the bed-clothes up under her ears, twisting the pillow into such shape that it screened the gas jet from her eyes.

For a few minutes the creature comfort of lying snugly in bed on a cold midwinter night among the harmonious surroundings of her luxuriously furnished room, prevailed over her mental discomfort. Then that reasserted itself.

Her brain seemed on fire. Thoughts unmanageable and evading capture, flitted hither and thither. Only one fact was distinct and paramount. She was a coward, an unspeakable, thoroughgoing, miserable coward. She was afraid of Earlcote, and of the money, and most of all she was afraid to tell Richard just what had happened. He had bitterly opposed her going, and she did not know what would happen if he were to learn of Earlcote's incredible impertinence.

But she longed for Dick's protection. At the moment she wished ardently, in spite of her chronic fear of marriage, that she and Dick were married. She wanted his name, she wanted the public brand upon her of being his possession. She wanted all the world, Earlcote particularly, to know that Dicky was her legitimate protector. She wanted to shift the responsibility for certain decisions from her own weak shoulders to his. Never had she felt so supinely helpless, so clingingly, almost cringingly feminine in her dependence upon Richard.

It occurred to her that she was very selfish in not procuring the scholarship for Dicky at the expense of the personal discomfort involved for herself, for she had little doubt that Earlcote's proposition to this effect had been perfectly sincere. But she felt that she did not have the moral strength required for the carrying out of such a distasteful arrangement. It was an arrangement requiring superhuman courage, and this she did not pretend to possess. She had her good points, but courage was not one of them.

Suddenly she decided that she would tell Richard she was willing to marry him at once. She remembered the memorable scene between them in which he had told her that he would not marry her unless her attitude toward marriage changed very materially. Betty was at loss to know whether the change that had occurred in her outlook would seem adequate to him.

Betty's mental processes were normally slow. She was not one of your Gatling gun thinkers, whose meditations zigzag across the horizon of the mind with lightning-like rapidity. She had earnestly striven to modify her views, but her feelings remained unaltered. Would Dick consider that the change was sufficiently great to warrant marriage?

A flood of tenderness, of gratitude for the love which he showed her in a thousand and one unconscious actions every day welled up in her. She heard him come in, talk to Mrs. Presbey in the parlor and then walk upstairs. She thought how sweet it would be if she had the right to call to him now and have him take her in his arms, and fall asleep thus.

Her cheeks flushed. Her innate modesty made even these feelings, feelings so steeped in affection as to render them wholly unsensual, seem indecorous. And suddenly she remembered the flood of tenderness, new and never-

felt-before, which had invaded her the evening of Earlcote's scathing criticism, while she held Richard in her arms. She divined that she had stood upon the threshold of the miracle that night.

She felt, too, that she had been cheating Richard of something which should have been his for some time. He had been exquisitely, divinely considerate of her. Now that she had had a little experience with men, now that Archie had ogled her and Earlcote had ridden roughshod over every maidenly instinct of modesty and reserve, she was able to appreciate Richard's delicacy and restraint.

She understood now—so much at least had she learned, that Richard was suffering intensely. She pitied him. She screwed up her courage to a mighty act of heroism. She would lie to him—pretend to feelings which she as yet did not own. It was true, he had succinctly and emphatically stigmatized such pretense on a woman's part as shameless, but to her it still seemed that the shamelessness was in feeling, not in pretending to feel.

She heard Dicky tiptoe softly to her door. Evidently he was worried about her.

She was seized with an impulse to call to him to wait, while she dressed and tidied up her room, and tell him the great virtuous lie then and there. She had a dim notion that before she had finished telling him the lie, through the magic of his presence, the lie might be converted into a truth. But just because of this premonition, she was unable to carry out her decision. She still clung to her own point of view. She crept to the door.

"Dick!"

"Betty—Sweet-heart, you're not ill?"

"No, darling."

"Can I do anything for you? Any powder? Drug?"

"No, Dicky, I need neither powder nor drug."

"What then?"

"Dicky, darling, play me something—anything."

"Gladly. Good-night, dearest."

"Good-night."

She crept back to bed. From the adjoining room, muffled by intervening closets and hallways, floated the strains of Mendelssohn's Spring Song. Betty loved the gentle music, gentle as any shepherd's roundelay. To-night it seemed more adorable than ever. She turned out the gas, and crept back to bed. Her last conscious thought was, "Why should my Dicky, who can make such heavenly music, not be content to love as if we were disembodied spirits—spirits unfettered and undimmed by the trammels of the flesh?

## CHAPTER XVI

It took Betty several days to screw her courage to the sticking point. More than once she essayed to speak to Richard, but Richard was somewhat unapproachable these days. The wrecking of his hopes regarding the European scholarship hurt him cruelly, and his Betty was responsible for suffering of a very different kind. Between the two agonies he felt that the only way in which he could "keep a stiff upper lip" was to ensconce himself in an armor of cool, supercilious indifference.

Betty understood all this thoroughly, but she did not possess the hardihood, the robust assurance necessary to break through Richard's reserve.

One evening he dropped a note on her desk, asking her not to wait for him at the office, and not to have Mrs. Presbey wait supper for him at home. It was after ten when he came in, and whistling blithely, he ran up the stairs three steps at a time. He rapped vigorously at Betty's door. She opened it for him. His face was radiant.

"What's happened?" she asked.

"Guess."

"Europe?"

His face quivered slightly.

"No."

"Money?"

"Yes."

Briefly he told her that Mr. Telfer was interested in a new concern which imported music from abroad. He was to play new music sent on approval one night a week,

and Mr. Telfer was carrying him on the payroll for an additional "ten spot."

"Oh, Dick, how perfectly splendid! If you are economical, Europe will be feasible after all."

"In a few years, yes. Meanwhile, without jeopardizing my hope of Europe, it makes something else more feasible than ever."

"Does it?"

He came and sat down beside her, and with gentle force took her by the shoulders and turned her about so that she faced him. Her eyes avoided his. Suddenly she said,

"Aren't you ever going to ask me to marry you again, Dicky?"

"Didn't I, just now?"

"Did you?"

"And you answer with a question."

"Did I? What an absent-minded beggar I am, Dicky. Please ask me to again.

"Elizabeth Garside, are you ready to marry me?"

"Richard Pryce, I am."

"Betty, you know what I mean by putting the question that way."

"Dicky, I know."

"Betty—this is a very serious matter. You are certain, dear, that you feel the right way about marriage now?"

Betty's heart beat wildly. The moment had arrived for launching the great, white virtuous lie upon a credulous lover. She said bravely:

"I've changed, Richard."

He took her in his arms.

"Betty," he said, "I was beginning to despair. I was disheartened, discouraged, utterly discouraged. Then he kissed her lips, kissed them lingeringly, hungrily. In-

wardly Betty recoiled from that kiss. But she gave no outward sign. She simply closed her eyes and allowed the swift current of his passion to brush over her as it listed.

"Betty," He was almost incoherent. Held in check, trampled upon, disregarded, flaunted, whipped out of sight, his passion was now an aggression, a tempest, a whirlpool. Again and again he whispered, "It is too good to be true." Again and again he kissed her passive mouth, and her throat, and her shoulders, gleaming white through the thin black lace waist, Still he restrained himself. Betty felt the delicacy of sentiment, the reverence for herself implied by this restraint, and she was more determined than ever to play the farce to the finish without allowing him to guess her indisposition for the completion of their love. The thought was an unhappy one.

There came sweeping over her again with torrential force all her terror of marriage—the strange feeling of panic and horror and outraged modesty which comes at times to every woman, and which no man, perhaps, can fathom or comprehend. It was unfortunate, furthermore, that Richard should have kissed her eyes at this moment, kissed them with such vehemence that she felt impelled to open them. What he read in her eyes sobered him in an instant.

"Betty, it's not true—you've been deceiving me."

It did not occur to her that she might continue to lie.

"Only for your sake, Dicky."

"Betty!"

"I was so sorry for you, Dicky. You've had so much trouble lately. I wanted to make you happy."

"Sorry for me!" He rose, and walked through the room, rumpling his hair with his long nervous fingers. He laughed gratingly. "Sorry for me—because I'm a

rotten failure, because you think I will never amount to anything."

"Dick, how can you? How can you? Sorry because that toad of an Earlcote cheated you out of an opportunity."

"And to make it up for me in some way you were going to sacrifice yourself!" He was terribly excited. His mouth twitched, the thin, agile fingers shot through the heavy crop of hair incessantly. "In Heaven's name," he broke out finally, "what do you take me for? I thought I made that plain,—I thought—" he broke off, ejaculating incoherent words.

"Dicky, listen to me, I did not deceive you wholly. I've changed immeasureably. I am trying to change. I want to understand now. I am anxious to understand. I—Oh, Dick, won't you make things a little easier for me?"

He came and sat down beside her. But he did not touch her. He did not dare to put his arms around her, for fear that the high criterion of conduct which he had set himself would then become impossible. It was Quixotic—it was perhaps blunderingly stupid. But Richard had high notions of what he owed his Betty. He would win her in his own high-minded way, or not at all.

"You mean, Betty, you would like to feel that you understand the universal need of womanhood when in love?"

"Yes, Dick. Can't you let it go at that? I do not believe I am capable of any deeper feeling. Perhaps some women are. But I know this, Dick. I could not love you more dearly than I do. It couldn't be Dick. You are my first thought in the morning, my last thought at night. You are with me all the time. I think of your dear face, your beautiful hands, and your heart, Dicky—

don't laugh at me—your heart of gold. You're with me always, all the time. Since I know you, Dick. It seems to me I have not been alone one second. Dick, I couldn't love you any more, could I?

He took her hands in his and kissed them with gentle passion.

"Betty!" he whispered, his voice hoarse with sudden desire, "Betty!"

"Dick, I am asking you to marry me."

He jumped up, and resumed his march around the room, his tapering, strong fingers as usual at work upon his hair. He was shaking with suppressed feeling, but he held valiantly to the light as he saw it. Suddenly, controlled once more, he came to her side, and dropped on his knees, putting his arms around her waist.

"Darling," he said, "darling—because you have never felt the fires of passion you cannot comprehend what suffering has been my portion. But you can at least understand that my willingness to wait for you is an earnest of my deep and reverent love for you."

"Yes, Dick, I understand that. And I, dear, love you so well, that listening to the voice of the heart, I lied to you, I lied, Dicky. Do you realize what that means to a girl like me?"

"Sweetheart, I do. I love you so well that I cannot bear to think you may some day judge me for marrying you prematurely, for accepting the gift of your love before acceptance of mine seems to you also a gift, not an imposition. I cannot bear to have you shrink from me in any way, least of all, in that way. In ordinary friendship, darling, we do not use our friends. It's not nice, not ethical. Any gift a friend makes us, we accept gladly in the spirit in which it is given. But we resent the gift of anything that is not cheerfully, even eagerly given. But you are taking it for granted that I am will-

ng to accept the greatest gift one person can make another without adequate return. I love you too well, dearest, to merely accept your love. Not until you can honestly surrender every fiber, every atom of body and soul to me, can I take the gift of your love. A heart for a heart, a soul for a soul, only in that way can the stronger tie between man and woman be cemented sanely, without prejudice to either or both.

"And I am sure, sweetheart, that one day you will realize all this. I am certain, darling, that under the surface of snow there slumbers the volcanic heart of a true woman."

"Why do you think so, Dicky?"

"Because your thoughts focus a good deal on this point. If it were otherwise, if you were defective, a woman incapable of love, you would have married me long ago without giving thought to anything but your carving cloths and pillow shams. But you have delved beneath the surface, darling, and the fact is a telling one."

"I believe you are right, Dicky." Betty said humbly. "I hope you are. I hope so principally for your sake."

## CHAPTER XVII

Dick went to his room a little later in a pitiably perturbed state. His nerves were completely unstrung. And yet, with the obstinacy of the virtuous man, he told himself that he could not have acted otherwise. The feminine part of his nature gave him an undue and perhaps hurtful insight into the nature of a woman's heart, and it was intolerable for him to think that he might roughly tamper with the delicate adjustment of Betty's woman nature, possibly flawing and scarring it for all time.

Sleep evaded him. His blood sang in his ears. His imagination was burning torchwise, became riotous, became more and more bold. He fancied himself in the sanctuary of Betty's arms—at night—alone, fancied that her chaste lips were raining burning kisses upon his, fancied that he felt her head with its fountain of black curls pillowed upon his breast.

The milk wagons were rattling past when Richard finally fell asleep.

This interview occurred on Tuesday evening. On Wednesday Betty left at three, while Richard, as usual, was slated to remain at the store during afternoon and evening. At about five o'clock a young lady, whose advent caused a ripple of excitement, entered the store.

"Aint she like Prudy?" ejaculated Miss Connors.

"She is and she isn't," retorted Miss Sharpe.

"Well, Prudy ain't never had such a corking suit. Look at them 'luppells,' will you? And them dinky little Frenchy-looking buttons down the back."

Richard had started forward as the girl entered, but had immediately seen his mistake in confounding a stranger with Betty, and was about to retire to his own little cubby-hole, when he saw that the young lady was walking directly toward him with the evident intention of speaking to him.

"Mr. Richard Pryce?"

"That's my name."

"I've been told to ask for you." Kitty spoke briefly, in a businesslike way. She had been asked to play some piano duets with a friend at an evening reception and she desired to purchase some music of this description.

Richard had the desired scores brought, and while she was fingering the music, offering this and that criticism as to editions, she said:

"I'll want someone to come up and play these duets with me. Several years have elapsed since I played them, and as I do very little piano playing these days, I'm not quite certain of myself. Could I make an arrangement to have someone call, someone who knows enough about music to point out the mistakes which I am liable to make?"

"I shall be happy to call whenever convenient to you."

"This evening?"

"Certainly. At what time?"

"Let me see. Is half past eight too early, or too late? Will that time suit you?"

"Perfectly."

"By the way—I'm Katarina della Florenzia." She handed him a card. "That's my stage-name, as you, of course, know, and there's my hotel address. You had better ask for Miss Florence at the hotel."

For the first time she looked frankly at Richard. He had studied her features at leisure, telling himself that her resemblance to Betty was really very elusive and

slight. But when Kitty looked at him, the dark eyes, so very much like Betty's in color, startled him. "What a pleasant, unaffected little girl," he thought, "even if she is a vaudeville star."

That was all. It had all been very brief and business-like, but her going left him in a flutter of excitement. It was pleasant to look forward to spending the evening with a girl who resembled Betty, though ever so vaguely, pleasanter at any rate, than standing behind the counter and answering the foolish questions of musical ignoramuses.

Then he wondered whether he ought to go home and change to a Tuxedo. He spent a good half hour debating the point, then decided to ask Mr. Telfer's advice. But the amiable and easy-going principal of the establishment at this moment made his exit through the side-door with a sheaf of new librettos under his arm, a sign that he had left for the day.

Then Richard decided suddenly to go home and don his Tuxedo.

After all he was so busy with a multitude of harassing details that he could not even find time to go to a restaurant for supper, much less to go home for his clothes. So he sent a messenger boy to Mrs. Presbey with request to send him his Tuxedo, and dined in his office on a ham sandwich and a glass of milk. There also, he made his toilet, bestowing as much care upon it as if he were going to a ball. He wanted to appear right in the eyes of the girl who resembled his Betty. Her hair was like Betty's, and her skin was as dazzlingly white, and altogether there was a resemblance of a sort. But now that he remembered her eyes, which had seemed so like Betty's when she looked at him the first time, it seemed to him that their expression was very different. Betty's eyes were dreamy and pure—dreamy as a fleecy cloud, pure

as cold spring water and as clear and cold. But in the vaudeville actress's eyes was a scintillating, titillating twinkling something the mere recollection of which puzzled him and made him strangely nervous.

Finally he was dressed. If Kitty had not expected him to appear in evening clothes, he reflected that his doing so could not possibly be construed as anything but a wish to appear *comme il faut.*

It was about quarter of nine when he entered the little parlor which Kitty occupied. Although he had been announced by telephone, she was not in the apartment when he entered, but came in a moment later from the adjoining bedroom. Before coming forward to greet him, she hastily pulled the portières to, and while he apologized for his tardiness, he wondered again at the resemblance, and now it seemed to him much more pronounced than in the afternoon.

Kitty, as Archie had truthfully said, was a genius at makeup. Such a talent presupposes the existence of a certain degree of psychological insight, and this Kitty undoubtedly possessed. She had played many parts both off and on the stage, and among those parts was that of ingenué. To-night she had dressed for her part with extraordinary and self-repressive skill. Gone from her person was every chicanery of toilet which to the demimondaine is an indispensable adjunct of dress; gone was towering, complicated coiffure; gone were diamond-studded, crocodile-shaped bracelets and three tier deep serpentine rings; gone was golden meshwork clasped with sapphires as a net for the hair; gone was the refined suggestiveness of varying sleeves; gone every tell-tale token that would have proclaimed her a woman of the world. The girl that stood with clasped hands and downcast eyes before Richard Pryce, was as innocent-looking, as virginal and sweetly, fragrantly maidenly as Betty her-

self. Nor had Kitty overdressed the part. The plain white gown, it is true, was a chiffon voile, not ordinary cotton voile such as Betty, more likely than not, would have worn, and the lace with which it was trimmed was genuine Italian filet. Her fingers were innocent of all but one ring, the customary solitaire affected by the young girl of good family. Her hair was dressed simply, girlishly, with only one white rose tucked among a billowing mass of ebony. A beautiful pair of superbly rounded arms peeped from sleeves that were not too short.

So fine was Kitty's art that, without having been in Betty's immediate proximity, she divined that Betty would eschew every perfume for her healthy, wholesome, beautiful young body, save that given by Nature and stainless cleanliness. And to simulate that fragrance of spotless purity, Kitty, for the first time in many years, wore undergarments unperfumed with heliotrope or violet, but laid away for three days among a smothering mass of powdered Italian orris-root, which, she knew, was the only possible means of approximating the indescribably sweet and evanescent perfume of virginal youth such as Betty's.

"Will we go to work at once?" she asked, lifting her eyes to Richard's face. He mumbled assent and, with clumsy fingers, began untying the package of music which lay unopened as his boy had delivered it.

Side by side they sat down at the piano, and Kitty began asking him questions about the music, about his conception of a correct interpretation. She had chosen Jensen's titillating Wedding Music, Moszkowski's delirious Spanish Dances and Brahms' Valse, Op. 39, and she indicated her wish to begin with the dances.

"I'm very uncertain about them," she said, adding as an afterthought that she earnestly hoped he would not

hesitate to correct any blunders in her interpretation. Richard thought her deference adorable.

Kitty played very well. She blundered twice or thrice, noticed her breaks herself, and asked Richard to play the passages with her again and again until she was letter-perfect. It was a curious fact which escaped Richard's attention that the passages which she desired him to play with her once more were invariably highly colored phrases, music so pulsing and vibrant and seductive that they were bound to communicate their throbbing intensity to the performer, and every time that Kitty asked Richard to replay a passage with her, she accompanied her request with a glance of her eyes, agleam and aflame with a deep, rich glow that made Richard's breath come hard and fast. Kitty prided herself that she could run her prey to ground without speaking or dancing or walking, merely by judicious use of eyes and lids and lashes. She had on one occasion in Vienna made a bet to this effect and won it, the object upon which she practiced her arts in that instance being a notorious roué, who had arrived at the age which Voltaire describes as the age when our vices leave us, not we our vices. To a woman, who could make easy conquest of a case-hardened, seasoned libertine and who knew every feminine trick calculated to lure and snare, a Richard Pryce seemed contemptibly easy prey.

After they had played Moszkowski's Dances three times, Richard's nerves were jumping like live wires, and Kitty suddenly exclaimed:

"Before we go on, we really must have something to eat. And to drink. The other music will not give me so much trouble."

It appeared that she had prepared a light repast consisting of caviare and smoked salmon sandwiches and champagne, in a small alcove which Richard had not

perceived before. Into this she invited Richard. The alcove was really a tiny apartment by itself, shut off by heavy portières from the larger room in which they had been sitting. Violets and lilies of the valley stood on the table, and filled the room with their fragrance, and a large lamp, with a dark red shade, was its sole method of illumination.

"I won't ring for a waiter to open the champagne," said Kitty. "I dare say you and I can manage it alone. Can't we?"

"I suppose so," Richard found himself saying, which was diametrically the opposite of what he wanted to say. He did not wish to accept Kitty's hospitality. He had a sudden horror of sitting down and drinking champagne with her. The girl who vaguely resembled his Betty should have conducted herself just as Betty would have done. And now he experienced a curious feeling of resentment against his hostess because of the resemblance which at first had seemed a guarantee for her character and manner and morality.

Somehow he opened a bottle of champagne nevertheless. Somehow a glass filled with the sparkling beverage found its way into his hand. He put it down again, and to hide the fact that he was not drinking, he ate a sandwich. He had had a very light supper, and the sandwich was delicious, so he ate another. Then Kitty bade him try the other kind, and he ate two little sandwiches of that. Neither smoked salmon nor caviare conduce to absolute temperance; the salt irritated Richard's throat, and he was ashamed to ask for a glass of water, so he sipped the champagne, and after he had sipped it, he forgot his resolution not to drink of it, and emptied his first glass.

She began asking him questions, questions of no moment, questions concerning trivial and commonplace

things. Then, without being questioned, she told him intimate incidents of her own life, of a stunted childhood and deprivation-ridden youth. It is true, most of the pathetic incidents were spurious, but how was Richard to know that?

His heart warmed to her. Enchantress and vixen that she was, she had, by using pulverized rock-candy mixed with a raw egg, modulated her commonplace and strident voice into softness and pliability. She was very like his Betty after all, Richard decided quite suddenly. Of course it was all wrong for her to be drinking champagne in a dimly lighted room with a strange young man, but poor child, being so very innocent, the thought had probably never occurred to her that some young men were not to be trusted. Richard had had some three or four glasses of champagne when he arrived at this point of his meditations, and he now began to wish earnestly that she would not look at him, her eyes held a quality that made the sparkle of the champagne he was drinking flat and stale in comparison. And because it was flat and stale, he drank still another glass, and another to quench his unquenchable thirst.

"Now, tell me about yourself? There is something I would like to ask you. Would you resent a personal question?"

"Why should I? Between friends?"

"I have been told that I slightly resemble the young lady to whom you are engaged. Do I?"

"You do and you don't."

"Begin with the don'ts. In what particular?"

"Well, for one thing—your eyes are different."

"That means that mine please you less."

"Hers would please me more if they possessed one quality of yours," he replied, thinking that he would give, he knew not what, to see in Betty's eyes the shift-

ing lights which proclaimed a fiery temperament, and with which Kitty's eyes were replete.

Kitty's finesse was fiendish. She did not exclaim "Flatterer" or "Really," or in any way accept the sentence as an amiable compliment, but, with masterful simulation of sincerity, began soberly to express her disapproval of it.

"You have no right, you know, to say that," she rebuked him gently. "The girl to whom a man is engaged should be perfect in his eyes."

"She is perfect, not only to me, but in reality."

"You are a puzzling sort of person. If she is perfect, why should you wish her eyes like mine?"

Richard opened his mouth, only to shut it again without having spoken. He possessed the fine sense of loyalty that made it distasteful to discuss Betty even with Betty's near-double. His brain was somewhat befogged, but he remained true to his breeding.

"Why?" Kitty questioned again. "If I were different from what I am, I would be immensely pleased by what you said. But I like to see men faithful in speech and thought as well as in act."

Richard flushed resentfully, as he replied:

"I am faithful to Miss Garside. Oh, I'll tell you what I mean. I think you have more temperament than she, and I wish she had just a little of that."

"Is she cold?"

"Cold and pure as snow."

"It is well to be pure as snow. But sunlight is pure also, and has the additional advantage of warmth. I am sorry for you. Why do you sit over there in the dark, Mr. Pryce? Come, sit here, near the table—or shall I make room for you here beside me on the divan?"

Richard rose and obediently sat down beside Kitty on the divan. The action was purely mechanical, for he was

so wholly occupied with the desire to clear himself of the imputed disloyalty to Betty that unconsciously he obeyed Kitty's suggestion to change his seat, just as a well-bred man subconsciously hands the salt and the ketchup at table upon request, without allowing that request to penetrate the channel of thought in which the table talk is flowing.

"That is better," said Kitty, when he was seated beside her.

"Yes," said Richard, "that's better. His thoughts were in a curious snarl. He wanted to further explain the remark he had made about Betty's temperament in justice both to himself and to her. He wanted to elucidate her beauty of character and spirit—and blame himself for having normal desires. To do so, however, would not be quite honest, and he wanted to be honest.

All the while Kitty sat regarding him with eyes of crepuscular sheen, eyes which flickered like the fluttering motes of gold that rise from a wood-fire. He experienced a desire to unbosom himself to Kitty concerning Betty's strange lack of emotion. He felt certain that Kitty would understand—perhaps be able to help him. But his vocabulary seemed to abscond as he tried to begin his story.

Kitty helped him.

"I should like you to tell me about your sweetheart," she said softly. "That is, if you care to. She may merely appear cold. We American girls are brought up that way, you know. She will change."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it. *You* will change her." Kitty bent forward so that her face was near Richard's. She gazed tenderly into his eyes, her voice was caressing, soothing, alluring. "I am sure you are sweet and gentle with her. Some day you will have your reward. She will

say, 'I love you. I adore you wholly and wholeheartedly. I am yours, *wholly yours.*'" She stressed the last sentence, and the edge she thus gave to it brought out its double meaning.

"Do you really think so?" Richard asked stammeringly. Waves of enormous length and sparkling heat seemed to leap from his heart to his brain.

"How could it be otherwise?" The eyes which held the love-light which all his ardor and wooing had been unable to bring to Betty's eyes looked up at him out of the face so like and yet so unlike Betty's. "Poor boy—poor boy, how you love her—the mere thought of her changes you—makes you different—very different."

"How different?"

Richard's voice was husky. By no effort could he clear it.

"You know—different. Poor boy! But believe me, she would not be cruel to you if she only understood."

Richard leaned back and closed his eyes.

"She does not know," he said, valiantly defending his absent love. "She is so pure. She does not know."

"Pure—will she be less pure when she turns from marble image into a living woman?"

"No, of course not."

"It is your own fault, I am afraid—that she is as she is. After all, you do not really wish her other than she is."

"I do—though only in that particular."

"Change her."

"I have tried," he groaned. "I have tried." He sat erect, very pale, hair slightly disheveled, shaken, but master of himself once more. To her chagrin Kitty saw her prey loosening the lasso she had thrown over him. The discovery that he was not as easy to deal with as she thought put her on her mettle.

"You have not tried enough."

"How? What do you mean? Every legitimate argument."

"Arguments instead of kisses!"

"There has been no dearth of kisses."

"But to argue, to attempt to argue such a point, you dear, foolish boy, when you yourself laud her coldness and call it purity. That undercurrent of thought, you know, is bound to neutralize any specific argument."

"I suppose that is true." Richard was wholly sobered.

"Poor boy," Kitty's voice held a cooing, wooing quality that sent poison-tipped arrows through Richard. "Poor boy. How pale you are, and only from thinking of her—if she saw you thus—would she not thaw? I cannot think she wouldn't. . . . To see the man she loves suffer—what greater suffering for a woman! And when she knows that she causes that suffering—that it lies in her power to alleviate it—in hers only——"

Kitty's voice trailed off into infinitude, leaving the phrase hanging in midair, unfinished, only half its meaning expressed, double its meaning suggested.

"In hers only," Richard repeated. Intuitively he felt his danger and he spoke the words which he repeated after Kitty as a sort of invocation, a prayer for deliverance, a verbal talisman. But the woman's eyes with the titillating, flickering light, and the voice of honey and cloves, and the white rose-petal face, the intoxicating, heavy fragrance of flowers, the dim, twittering twilight were doing their deadly work.

Sick, giddy, feeling strength in him to trample mountains into crumbling dust, to snatch oak trees from their century old foundations and hurl them into space, to take the woman he loved into his arms and hold her against all the world—he leaned back once more, and once more closed his eyes. Once his fingers fumbled

through his hair, then, with their latent powers of unexpended strength in them, fell inertly to his side.

"If she could only be brought to realize," murmured the voice.

"She does not realize." He was writhing in misery, but had enough sanity left to defend her whom he loved.

"Poor boy."

"Don't pity me."

"But I do—I cannot help it. My heart aches for you."

"It's sweet of you to care."

"Care! If I thought you cared to have me care!"

He felt cool fingers laid on his burning eye-lids.

"Oh," he gasped. Then reached for her fingers and pulled them away. "Don't," he said. "Please don't."

"Don't what, Richard?"

"Don't touch me with your fingers."

"You are holding them."

He relinquished her hand. He tried to brace himself, to pull open his eyes, but instead, he felt upon his eyes the soft pressure of lips, and a moment later the lips had closed upon his.

His inert, limp body became galvanized into towering, Herculean force. He took her into his arms, and clasped her to his breast, and rained mad showers of blindly directed kisses upon the sweet upturned face lying in his embrace with closed eyes. But he knew the light that lay behind the lids still flickered and invited, still twinkled and harassed, still gleamed and maddened, although the lids shut out from his eyes all these myriad caprices.

Even while he kissed her he told himself that he was doing a shameful thing. But he did not care. He was only human, only flesh and blood. Poor flesh and blood

that ultimately must succumb to thumbscrews and burning stake!

He was possessed to see her eyes once more, and he fell to kissing the soft lids, with their sweeping black lashes, kissing the delicate, sensitive things almost as tempestuously and as roughly as he had kissed the lips.

"Don't, don't, you are hurting me."

She struggled away from him. Betty, too, had repulsed him. Betty's repulses had repulsed in good earnest, while this girl's repulse only lashed his fever into increased heat. He captured the hand that was warding him off. He possessed himself of the sweet hands and arms, and kissed on with blind fury. Now and then she cried, "Don't, don't, you are hurting me," and now and then she demanded, "Kiss my lips again."

He no longer felt culpable. He was not mad now. He had been mad before when he had resisted and sparred. It was his Betty, his own, who was thus transformed. It had been a silly dream of his in which he had thought her someone else.

A little later she disengaged herself from his embrace, and leaving him sitting on the divan, his head resting in his cupped hands, she went to the door. She returned with the key in her hand.

"Richard," she said, and when he looked up she gave him the key. He received it uncomprehendingly, stupidly. But when she looked at him with orbs that swam in liquid fire, his stupefaction gave way to blinding comprehension.

He stood with the key in his hands, watching her as she retreated into the room that adjoined the parlor. For a brief interlude, sanity returned to him, bringing with it biting self-denunciation. He felt a desire to drop the key where he stood and to make his escape. The odor of the flowers stifled him; the heat was suffocat-

ing; he felt dazed, stupid, heavy; it occurred to him that to leave now, without a word of explanation, would be the worst affront a man could offer a woman. Curiously enough, he hardly thought of Betty, and yet she seemed to be there with him—he seemed to sense her presence. At that a blind impulse seized him, and obeying it, he made his way out of the alcove, across the room and to the door. He fitted the key into the lock, and was about to open the door through which he firmly intended to leave.

"Richard!"

He hesitated before turning. He knew that to turn was to stay. And he wanted to go, to get away. Had Kitty been less of an artist in the rôle she had essayed, she would have called his name imperiously the second time, and the sound of a sharp tone, issuing from that mouth, so like his Betty's, would have restored complete sanity to the boy's bewildered brain. But Kitty was an artist. When she spoke his name again, it was in an appealing, not a commanding tone.

"Richard!"

Slowly, as if some invisible hand were turning him on a pivot, he turned. She was forced to speak his name a third time before he faced her. He started. She had consummated one of the lightning changes of dress for which she was noted and stood before him, her black curls, secured only with a white ribbon, flung over one of the pair of gleaming white shoulders revealed by the low-cut white kimono made of material so diaphanous that, as the light was burning brightly behind her, while the apartment in which Richard stood was only inadequately lighted by the dark red drop light on the table, every line of the exquisite young figure, gracious curves of bust and hips, and long cool lines of torso and limbs, were plainly limned.

Slowly, without speaking, without removing her liquid black eyes from his face, she stepped back into the adjoining room. Quickly, without speaking, in his eyes a wolfish gleam, he followed.

His very virtue, the abstinence he had practiced all his life, the passion he had so long suppressed were contributing to his undoing.

## CHAPTER XVIII

When Richard awoke it was one o'clock. One o'clock and a moonlight night! At first he did not remember; the strange surroundings, the wine he had taken the night before and to which he was unaccustomed held him for a few moments in the ante-chamber of slumber, the strange state between sleeping and waking when the brain seems awake and the body asleep.

Leaning upon an elbow, he glimpsed his companion. Even then remembrance halted and shuffled stumblingly. For one moment he thought that he had gone insane; that there was a lapse in his conscious memory; that things had finally so arranged themselves that Betty had become his wife.

At that moment the moonlight fell aslant his companion's face, and the boy recoiled in horror. Remembrance rushed over him turbulently. Every detail of his shame came back to him.

Was this the woman who resembled his Betty, as he had thought? Waking, past mistress of acting that she was, and necessarily in perfect control of her facial muscles, Kitty had simulated the artless and innocent young girl to perfection; asleep, all muscles relaxed, lacking the driving force that temporarily cancelled the traces of evil living and substituted instead the expression left by sweet and gracious thoughts, the only resemblance between the two young women was the black hair and pale complexion, and even the latter, in Betty always suggestive of the fragrant delicacy of the white rose, now

seemed coarse-grained and unhealthy and artificial in Kitty.

Richard's heart seemed to vault out of his body in a gigantic parabola. What he remembered was too hideous to be dwelt upon. Fire ran through his veins.

Employing infinite precaution, he crept from the bed, gathered up his belongings and carried them into the sitting room. He dressed in the alcove with shaking fingers, in terror lest Kitty should awaken. He felt himself unequal to facing her, unequal to deal with such an impossible situation. The odor of the dying flowers sickened him; the stale smell of the champagne glasses and bottles produced nausea. And all the while some little mechanism in his head seemed to tick out the words, "And you thought her like Betty."

Finally he found himself outside in the hall. He did not wait for the elevator but walked down the five flights of stairs. His knees were like jelly; he thought every moment that he must fall. He felt so very ill, that he wondered vaguely whether a glass of something or other would not do him good. But he did not know what to ask for, what to take for this unearthly, creepy feeling.

At last, when he was out under the bright moonlit January sky, he stood at the curb, drinking in the crisp, cold night air like a man who has just made his escape from a cavern filled with sewer-gas. He began to walk, he did not know and did not care in what direction. But he walked with frantic haste, as if violent exercise alone would kill thought.

When the clock on Herald Square struck three, he found himself at the junction of Fifth Avenue and Thirty-fourth Street. Suddenly he felt chilled to the marrow. He hailed a taxicab and jumped into it.

In his own room at last, without undressing, he threw himself upon his couch bed. Here, in his own familiar

surroundings, he felt that he would be able to give adequate thought to the unspeakable thing that had happened. As if thinking it over would mend matters! But he did not think. After intense nervous shocks nervous temperaments experience a bodily fatigue that courts sleep. Richard slept heavily until seven in his clothes.

He undressed, bathed, and redressed, and while thus occupied had ample time to consider the situation. He was utterly crushed with a sense of his iniquity; he told himself that he had fallen into the bottomless pit, and that if he had any courage and manliness and decency left in him, he would go to Betty and make a clean breast of the whole miserable affair. On the other hand, his fine sense of courtesy and modesty suggested that to unburden himself by confession to Betty would be to add cowardice to guilt. The sense of sin would be much harder to bear if he forebore making his confession. To do without her forgiveness, when, he felt certain he might have it for the asking, at the cost, however, of polluting her innocence, that, he told himself, was to be his punishment.

On his way to the dining-room he remembered the question she had asked him the night they had heard Tannhaeuser: "Can you understand how a man loving one woman can be the lover of another?" And he had answered "No." And he had not understood and did not understand, although he was culpable of the same odious offense.

Had he been less modest-minded, he would have considered himself partially exonerated by the fact that Kitty resembled Betty—for he was sufficiently unsophisticated not to suspect Kitty's make-up. But resemblance only added another damning item to his guilt. He had not merely polluted himself—he had spattered Betty with mud. His self-revilement knew no bounds.

Thrice he turned away from the dining-room before he could muster sufficient courage to enter. Finally, hearing that Mrs. Presbey had come in from the kitchen, he took his courage in his hands and walked into the room. He found he was afraid, horribly afraid, of being alone with Betty. He had wondered, while dressing, that his features did not bear some shameful mark—his eyes some sign of his guilt. He thought that iniquity such as his, acting like a toxin, must poison and distort the entire visage.

While he pretended to eat his oatmeal, he suffered great suspense lest either Mrs. Presbey or Betty or both would ask him at what time he had come in. But Betty chatted merrily about some funny incident she had witnessed in the street, and Mrs. Presbey had a laughable anecdote to relate of Nora's unparalleled stupidity.

Suddenly Mrs. Presbey said:

"I didn't hear Richard come in last night. Did you hear him, Miss Betty?"

"No," said Betty. "One never hears him when he comes in late. My Dicky is always considerate."

"Considerate!" Richard grew crimson.

Mrs. Presbey laughed.

"Just look at your Dicky blushing because you are patting him on the shoulder. Well, Richard, I will say this for you. You are a good boy. You've lived in my house for five years, and I fancy I know you as well as anybody does. I don't believe you could do a wrong thing."

Having thus eulogized her favorite, Mrs. Presbey rose and majestically sailed from the room to superintend the frying of Richard's wheat cakes, which, being destined for Dicky's stomach, Nora was not competent to handle. Betty and Richard were alone.

"Isn't she a dear to say all that about you? Of course

it's true. You are the only and original package in the way of masculine perfection." Bubbling over with laughter, and masking her pride in her Dick under the cloak of slang, Betty leaned toward Richard. "You haven't kissed me, yet, sir," she said.

"Haven't I?" Dick simulated absent-mindedness. Beads of perspiration stood on his brow. How could he kiss her—his Betty—spotless and pure beyond the reach of the imagination, after the occurrence of the previous night?

"Dicky, darling, what's the matter with you? Did you have an unpleasant evening?"

"Not so awfully pleasant."

She brushed a recalcitrant curl from his brow. He shrank visibly from her touch. His perfervid imagination, always proceeding by leaps and bounds, propelled him into a vision of the lepers of old, who, segregated in one quarter of the town, were forced by the inflexible, religious law of the day to cry out, "Unclean, Unclean," when a stranger passed them by the wayside or in the streets, lest he defile himself by accidentally brushing against them. If he, Richard, were to have his due, "Unclean, Unclean," would be his cry of warning to ward off Betty's caressing fingers.

"Poor dear, I won't bother with questions." And she began chatting about indifferent subjects, with the evident intention of deflecting his thoughts into pleasant channels.

He contrived to see little of her all day. When evening came, instead of walking home with her, he pretended to be too busy to go home for supper. Although he was not busy, he remained at the store until eleven, creeping stealthily to his room when he got home.

Through the night he felt ill. The next day certain symptoms alarmed him, and leaving the office a little

earlier than usual, he stopped at Dr. Moran's. Dr. Moran, after a brief talk, confirmed Richard's worst fears.

"My dear young man," he said not unkindly, "you should have taken my advice. As you are able to afford marriage, you should have married, instead of taking this risk. If young men would only learn to keep clear of such intrigues not from ethical or religious scruples, but for physiological reasons."

Richard said not a word. He was stunned by the physician's words, enervated by this horror which had swooped down upon him, dazed by the circumstance that the man of medicine evidently believed he had committed the offense with deliberate intent. His head seemed splitting asunder. He wanted to clear himself in the physician's eyes of this aspect of the guilt. He wanted the practitioner, scribbling a prescription upon his pad, to know that he had not been as vile as all that. Finally he stammered,

"It was not——"

"Not what?" asked Dr. Moran, without looking up from the prescription.

"Not deliberate, on my part."

"Not deliberate——?" Dr. Moran gazed at Richard in amazement for a moment, then he said, kindly, "I understand. Unfortunately nature makes no allowances. Professionally it comes to the same thing. I wish all young men could be made to realize that marriage is the only safe outlet. Of course some do realize it, and take the risk nevertheless. That's due largely to the high cost of living, and not to inherent immorality, as some folks would have us believe. Our complex civilization makes it impossible, except for a favored few, to marry before thirty or thirty-five, because it takes a man so much longer now-a-days to equip himself for the dis-

charge of his professional or business duties. But young men are young men now as formerly at a much earlier age, and nature unfortunately is inconsiderate enough not to prolong the period of physical adolescence to match the prolongation of man's present educational adolescence. Hence men take the risk of becoming physical pariahs for several years."

"A physical pariah," gasped Richard, "what do you mean?"

The physician, having adroitly brought the conversation to the point which gave him the desired opening, continued:

"Mr. Pryce, I am very sorry for you. How you came to let yourself in for this I do not know, and, as I am your medical and not your religious adviser, it is none of my business. But I can see this. The phrase which is frequently applied to women can aptly be applied to you. You have been more sinned against than sinning."

Richard looked at him gratefully.

"But tell me, why didn't you marry?"

"I'll tell you, Dr. Moran. The girl I am engaged to has a horror of marriage. In your profession, do you find that attitude unusual?"

The physician became very grave.

"It is very much more usual than is generally believed," he said.

"And I loved her so well, that, although she was willing to marry me, I insisted on waiting. I wanted her to change, first."

"That spirit of consideration is unusual." Dr. Moran looked at Richard curiously. "Usually men care only for themselves." He rose, and putting his hand on Richard's shoulder, said:

"My boy, I am really more sorry for you than I can say. Buck up. I'll pull you through all right. But, of

course, as a man of honor, you will not marry for three years. You know, of course, that it takes that long, sometimes longer, to cure this disease. Apparently you will be well in a few months as far as your general health is concerned. You will be somewhat weakened, that is all. But the danger of infecting others remains. You understand me?"

"Yes," said Richard, thickly. His lips seemed glued together. Good Heavens—what if Betty were to declare herself willing in good earnest to marry him now? The miracle he had hoped and wished and prayed for had become a thing to be feared. He listened as in a dream to the physician's instructions. Blindly he walked from the office, and out into the street. He was trembling so violently that he could hardly stand. He leaned against a railing for support.

"My God," he said, "My God," and it was not a curse but a prayer of a soul in mortal agony.

A matronly, wholesome-looking woman of about forty-five stopped, glanced at Richard's chalky face and asked, kindly:

"Are you ill?" She spoke with the quiet dignity which a well-bred woman evinces when extraordinary circumstances force her to accost a stranger.

"No—thank you, I am not ill."

The woman lingered.

"I am not ill," Richard repeated. "I have had a nervous shock, that is all."

The woman walked away slowly. Once she turned, glanced back, and then walked away.

And now one word and one only rang through the boy's maddened brain. "Unclean, unclean, unclean." He had thought himself spiritually polluted. That had been bad enough, but to suffer spiritual pollution carried with it a certain dignity. But this! He shrank from himself in

horror. His self-loathing, self-abasement and self-disgust knew no bounds.

The thought of suicide came to him. "The wages of sin are Death." Odd, how Bible words and Bible phrases came bubbling to the top of the cauldron of thought. But what good would his suicide do Betty?

A sudden spasm of fury possessed him. It seemed to him that the wrong-doing into which he had been trapped was receiving a punishment out of all proportion to its magnitude. The access of fury cleared his brain and relaxed the fearful tension of his nerves. He set his jaw grimly, pulled himself together vigorously and walked rapidly in the direction of his home. His manliness had reasserted itself. He was ready, to use his own phrase, "to take his medicine like a man."

## CHAPTER XIX

The delicate question, whether honor required that he tell Betty or keep his shame from her, consumed Richard's every leisure moment for days to come. He was still in the throes of his mental struggle when the unexpected happened.

"Dick," said Betty one evening after supper, when, as usual since his downfall, he was trying to get to his room unperceived by her, "I would like a long talk with you. Have you time?"

"Yes, Betty."

"Dicky dear," she said nervously, when they were seated side by side on the Davenport, "I am getting the habit, I am afraid."

"What habit, Betty, dear?"

"Of proposing to you, Dick?"

"I think I did the proposing a good many months ago."

"Yes, proposing to be engaged. But I propose that we get married. Dicky, darling, for selfish as well as unselfish reasons, I want you to marry me. I don't want you to cross-examine me again as to this and that. I cannot explain just why, dear, but I want your name—I want to be your wife."

"Betty!"

"I have the floor, Dicky, so don't interrupt me. And then, dear, I am afraid I am not going to change further than I have changed. And, Dicky, dear, if I love you well enough to be willing to marry you feeling as I

do, you ought to love me well enough to marry me in spite of my shortcomings, for the love I am giving you, dearest, is very precious even if it lacks one element, and Dicky, I am humble now. I am no longer proud of feeling as I do. You, dearest, will have to help me overcome my shortcoming as if it were a deficiency of speech, or eyesight, or hearing."

"Betty!"

"Dicky, don't make me do all the love-making. I am through with what I have to say. It sounds rather thin and meagre, I cannot make words chime like music as you can, but I love you, Dicky, I love you, oh more, far, far more than I can say. And if it were not sinful, I would wish that some misfortune would befall after we are married, some illness—I hardly know what—so I can prove to you how I love you."

"Betty,—sweetheart——"

He sat with his head buried in his hands. She slipped from the Davenport and knelt down beside him. She clasped her hands over his, trying with gentle force to pull them away from his face.

"Dick," she said, "Dick, what is the matter? Surely, dear, I have said nothing to make you cry?"

His soul was in process of upheaval. He could not tell the naked, unvarnished truth to this spotless flower of womanhood, this girl who was so incredibly pure. How to disinfect words, how to render them antiseptic so that in telling her he need not sully that pristine soul?

"Dick, what is it?"

"Betty, at present it will be impossible for us to marry."

"What has happened?"

He did not reply.

"Anything wrong with your position at Telfer's, Dick?"

"No, Betty."

"What then?"

"The truth is, I'm not quite well, Betty. It will be some time before I am well. It wouldn't be fair to marry you before I am all shipshape."

"Dicky," her voice was jubilant, "I'm so sorry, of course, dear, but isn't this just the opportunity I have been anxious for? Darling, it's a curious thing for a girl to beg her betrothed to marry her. And I am on my knees too! What an affecting scene, Dicky!" Laughter tripped from her lips. "Dicky, Dicky, you cannot be so very ill, or I would be much sadder than I am. But you must marry me at once, dearest. There will be so many little things I can do for you once we are man and wife."

He did not reply. His ordeal surpassed in cruelty anything he had imagined possible.

"Dick?"

"No, Betty, it would not be right."

"But Dicky, I want it—I . . ." She broke off, and studied him attentively. "Dick, is the trouble serious? What is it? Your insomnia?"

She became very grave. All the ripples of laughter died from her face. Only the light remained in her eyes.

"Dearest," she entreated, "won't you tell me what is wrong? If it's insomnia, there is some ulterior cause for that, isn't there?"

He looked at her humbly, mutely.

"Dicky," she persisted, "if it is insomnia, when we are married, I can sit by your side and sing you to sleep—as you played me to sleep the night you nursed my bad ankle. Do you remember?"

Did he remember!

"Betty," he said, "it is not to be thought of. We will have to wait until I am quite well."

"What is the real trouble, Dicky?"

"I cannot tell you, dear."

"I see. Dick, is it really serious?"

"No, darling, you must not be alarmed. It is not dangerous, if that is what you mean. But it is impossible to marry—just now."

She allowed the subject to drop. The young girlish face looked pinched and furrowed. In her eyes was a look of troubled perplexity. Throwing her arms impetuously about his neck, she kissed him tenderly.

"Dicky, I think you are the most unselfish man that ever walked the earth."

For a long time they sat hand in hand, cheek to cheek. It was torture indefinable for him to sit with her thus, but the agony was very different from the agony of former days.

Most bitter of all was the thought that now after the voice of the heart had spoken so eloquently from Betty's lips as to sweep away all the scruples he had entertained of marrying her before the voice of the flesh also had spoken, he could not marry her after all. That, perhaps, was the most refinedly cruel part of his punishment.

## CHAPTER XX

On the following Wednesday afternoon, Betty left the office at three as usual, and at four Mr. Telfer made his final exit through the surreptitious side door. Richard, remembering that he had forgotten to look up a press notice in one of the musical gazettes which Mr. Telfer wanted mailed that night, went into the small apartment serving as an anteroom to Mr. Telfer's private office to consult the file rack containing the current periodicals.

While he was bending over the table, penknife poised to sweep down upon the item in question as soon as he had located it, the door was pushed open slowly and cautiously. Kitty, sweeping aside office boys and clerks with the authoritative air of the stage favorite, had achieved the impossible and penetrated into the sanctum of Mr. Telfer's private rooms without being announced.

Richard, when he saw her, was aghast.

"You!" he cried.

"I." Without taking the trouble to close the door, which would have necessitated her turning away from Richard, she came forward, eyes bent upon Richard, gliding over the heavy Wilton carpet with the serpentine grace of the boa-constrictor, fascination and danger suggested by every movement of the subtle body. Upon Richard, suddenly there flashed the old, old simile of the serpent and the apple before the fall. He thought he understood now why the serpent, of all created things, was chosen to represent the obnoxious part allotted it.

For the second time it struck him as curious how Scriptural metaphors, and phrases and thoughts came harking back to him since his sin.

"You do not seem particularly pleased to see me."

His innate courtesy forbade the obvious retort that she was quite right.

"I am surprised to see you."

"Surprised? Not as greatly surprised as I was on Thursday morning, a week ago, Richard—" the glorious, wicked eyes were playing hypnotically upon him. "Don't you think, dear sir, that taking French leave as you did was highly ungallant, to say the least?"

Richard looked at her coldly.

"I think that between you and myself we need not mince words. I never wish to see you again, Miss Florence."

His bluntness made her angry, piqued her vanity, annoyed and amazed her incredibly.

"You are a novelty, certainly," she said. "I have never met anyone just like you before. The first time, practically, that we meet, you carry me off my feet, and then——"

"I carried *you* off your feet?"

"Well, didn't you?" She asked impudently. She had taken his measure and correctly appraised his fine courtesy. But being evil herself she could not comprehend that repentance can follow moral delinquency.

"No," said Richard very gravely, "I think it was the other way. I think I was carried off my feet."

Kitty caught her breath with a quick intake. She grew crimson with anger. She was about to vent her displeasure, but remembered in time that only a complete alienation of the betrothed couple would place her in possession of the Kasi-Nook.

"You flatter me," she said smoothly. "You ascribe

the little *entr'acte* to my charms while I ascribe it to yours. We will not quarrel about it. Being a woman, I will accept your compliment. So be it. I am responsible for what occurred."

Richard looked at her in blank astonishment. Such adroitness in fencing, such moral callousness in speaking lightly, with raillery, of an offense which loomed before his vision as the sin of sins, shocked him terribly. He made no reply.

Perceiving that her tactics had been at fault, Kitty continued, falling into a different tone:

"Richard, why do you treat me like this? Why do you treat me with such pretended indifference? Surely, you must have some feeling for me?"

She touched his arm lightly with her gloved hand. He shook it off as he would have shaken off an obnoxious bug, an ant or a spider. There was no mistaking the gesture as one of contempt.

Kitty frowned. The task that lay before her was difficult. Her feminine self-love and vanity formed an even stronger incentive to persevere in hopes of ultimate success, than the single desire to possess Earlcote's black opal. She become tenderly serious.

"Won't you tell me why you are so angry with me? Surely, you are not the man to show brutal scorn to a woman for loving you too well—unwisely?"

Richard stared at her in outraged silence.

"Richard!"

The power of speech came back to him at last.

"Miss Florence," he said, "the situation is perfectly clear. Let us call things by their black, ugly, common names, and not apply pretty, delicate, scented names to a very sordid and pitiful affair. I did not lead you astray. And I am ashamed, more bitterly ashamed of the affair than I can say. I am engaged to the sweetest

and best and truest girl in the world and through you I must forego marriage with her indefinitely."

In imagination Kitty saw the black opal suspended as a pendant from her neck. How well the bluish glimmer would go with her hair and eyes!

She masked her eagerness under the guise of solicitude.

"You haven't been foolish enough to tell her?"

"Ultimately I will have to."

"Haven't you an uncommonly sensitive conscience, my dear Richard?"

"I have got to tell her. There can be no other way, ultimately."

Something in his voice, some quiet dignity of manner wholly free from cheap pathos struck a chill to her heart. She did not grow pale. Outward protection rendered Kitty's cheeks immune to sudden and embarrassing changes of color. But her face underwent a terrible change.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean that my physician tells me I must not marry for at least three years to come."

Kitty put out her hand and caught blindly at the table as if to steady herself. Her lips moved without speaking. After a little while she asked,

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

She walked through the room and suddenly he saw her collapse into a chair.

"I didn't know," she gasped. "I didn't know."

Richard had every reason to hate and despise her, but now, realizing that she was enduring the same panic that had swept through him in Dr. Moran's office, the chivalry toward women practiced by countless generations of men of gentle birth and breeding, came to the fore.

"I had no idea that you did not know," he said, "or I would not have told you so brusquely." He went to the ice-cooler and drew a glass of water.

"Drink that," he commanded.

Natures like Kitty's rally quickly from the severest nervous shocks. While she was drinking the water she reflected that the alienation was really more complete and final than any she had believed possible. The black opal was hers. She smiled composedly as she returned the glass to Richard.

"Good-bye," she said. "Needless to say I am sorry." And she tripped lightly from the room.

From the gallery, two-pairs of knowing eyes, eyes made knowing by ears that had heard the entire conversation through the open door and the encased staircase, looked at each other and winked.

## CHAPTER XXI

While Kitty was on the gallery the next morning, checking up the mail orders, Miss Sharpe said:

"Do you know Katarina della Florenzia, Miss Garside?"

"No," said Betty.

"But you know of her, of course?"

"Of course."

"She was here yesterday."

"Well," Betty remarked, indifferently, "a good many stage celebrities come here, don't they?"

"They do. But they usually come to buy music."

Something in Miss Sharpe's tone made Betty look up.

"And didn't Miss della Florenzia come to buy music?"

"She may have."

A vague uneasiness came over Betty.

"Evidently she didn't."

"Well, whatever she came for, she didn't buy any music. She didn't ask to be shown any music. She didn't speak to any of the salesmen."

Betty came over to Miss Sharpe's desk.

"What do you mean?" she asked. She had the sensation of an impending calamity.

"Oh, nothing," said Miss Sharpe, and glanced past Betty toward Miss Connor's desk. "Oh, nothing." Infinite malice were contained both in glance and tone.

"Certainly you wished me to infer something or other from what you said just now, Miss Sharpe." Betty felt annoyed and showed it. "I suppose I am obtuse. Won't you please be plain?"

"Plain about what?"

Betty became angry. It was a rare occurrence for that gentle spirit to show downright anger, but Miss Sharpe, on more than one occasion, through her provocative manner, had achieved the seemingly impossible.

Without another word, Betty walked away, back to the table on which she checked the work done on the gallery.

Miss Sharpe's manner, even more than her words, filled Betty with haunting discomfort. She suspected nothing definite. It never occurred to her that Miss Sharpe wished her to infer that Richard was in any way implicated in the vaudeville actress's visit. Richard and she belonged to each other so completely, that the possibility of his giving even a fleeting thought to any other woman never suggested itself to Betty. Only a nature wholly spiritual can attain such a state of utter unsuspiciousness. Often she had seen him chat and laugh and jest with women customers, just as she chatted and laughed and jested with men for whom she played this or that song or dance or sonata.

Miss Sharpe had more than once set Betty's nerves a-quiver with her irritating half-spoken, half-suppressed statements, statements which usually had some palpable objective; but her remarks to-day had been as intangible as moonshine on water. By four o'clock Betty had become so nervous not merely from remembering Miss Sharpe's allusions but even more from the insidious glances which Miss Sharpe cast above and around, but never at her, that Betty threw discretion to the winds.

"Miss Sharpe," she said, "I really wish you would do me the favor to explain what you referred to this morning."

"What are you referring to?" in a tone of utter noncomprehension.

"Miss Florence,—della Florenzia."

"Oh!"

"Well?"

"What did you wish me to tell you, Miss Garside?"

"Why did she come here?"

Miss Sharpe sighed.

"I do not know that I do right in telling you."

"If you feel that way, I really do not know why you tried to arouse my curiosity."

"Well, you see, in a way I feel it is my duty to speak out."

"Your *duty?*"

"Don't you think, Miss Garside, one decent girl owes another decent girl the truth in certain matters?"

"I suppose so. What in all the world has that to do with Miss Florence?"

"Miss Florence came to see Mr. Pryce."

Betty swallowed hard to keep in check the tidal wave of rage that rose within her.

"What of it?" she asked. "Mr. Pryce, through his connection with the Musical Progress League, may have business of a private nature with her."

"Her business with him was of a private nature, indeed," said Miss Sharpe, dryly.

Betty's heart fluttered wildly.

"You will have to speak plainly now, Miss Sharpe."

"Well, Wednesday a week ago, Mr. Pryce was asked to go to Miss Florence's hotel with music she wished him to play with her."

"Nothing unusual in that, is there?"

"No."

Again the tone which belied the words, the tone which harassed and tortured nerves sensitive to masked hostility. Betty looked searchingly at Miss Sharpe, who continued:

"Something unusual happened at her hotel."

"What grounds have you for saying so?"

"From what she said to Mr. Pryce."

"And pray, how do you know what she said to Mr. Pryce?"

Miss Sharpe jabbed her pencil in the direction of Mr. Telfer's room.

"Our speaking-tube," she said, "and they omitted to close the door."

Betty could not misunderstand the allusion this time.

"I really think," she said, "that I have listened long enough."

"I suppose you are afraid to hear the end?"

"Afraid? Hardly. Perhaps you had better say all you have to say, after all."

"Well, from what they said to each other, Mr. Pryce's visit to her the other evening—it's difficult to tell, you know."

"What you hint at is impossible. Mr. Pryce is not that sort of a man."

"Well, it's so, nevertheless. There are consequences."

"Consequences?"

Betty grew white to the lips. "Consequences?" She could hardly speak, so shaken was she. "Miss Sharpe, you don't mean——"

"Not for her, if that is what you thought. For him."

To Betty, in her divine innocence, this came as an anti-climax. The suspicion which she had harbored collapsed like a balloon pricked with a pin. She laughed.

"Miss Sharpe," she asked, "aren't you talking nonsense?"

"Well, I heard what I heard." Realizing Betty's unbelievable ignorance, Miss Sharpe became frightened. She had meant to make Betty temporarily miserable, but her malice was not great enough to make her desire to

see Betty plunged in an abyss of misery. She anticipated an unpleasant five minutes. It was impossible, of course, to beat a retreat. Betty was in total ignorance of the terrible disease which stalks in the trail of forbidden pleasure, and Miss Sharpe was forced to elucidate and explain a good deal more than she found agreeable. She was badly frightened by the deathlike pallor that spread over Betty's features.

Miss Sharpe's communication had a strange effect upon Betty. A terrible hatred rose in Betty's heart, not for Richard, nor for Kitty—but for Miss Sharpe. She kept telling herself over and over again that it was all a lie, that there was no truth in the whole story. But one fact of colossal importance stared her in the face and argued in favor of Miss Sharpe's having spoken the truth. Richard's story of a mysterious disease dovetailed perfectly with Miss Sharpe's tale.

At four o'clock she told one of the clerks that she was ill and was going home. The rule of the office required that Richard, who was in charge, be consulted as to the curtailing of hours for any reason whatsoever, but Betty found it impossible to go to him. The salesman to whom she gave the message, frightened by her white face, and knowing of her engagement to Richard, ran pell-mell into Richard's room and hurled the information at him that "Miss Garside is awfully sick and has gone home."

"When?"

"This minute." Richard picked up hat and coat, and rushed from the store without waiting to put on his overcoat. He struggled into it as he ran after Betty, who was half a block away by this time. He was at her side in less than a minute.

"Betty, what is the matter?"

"Oh, Dick!"

"Betty!" He put his arm under hers to support her.

"Let me take yours instead, Dicky."

"Darling, what is it? Headache? Nausea?"

"Wait till we get home."

She clung to his arm desperately. "Dicky, oh Dicky," she said once or twice. Only her inherent breeding kept her from collapsing on the street and giving vent to the myriad feelings which oppressed her.

Finally, when they got home, he followed her into her room. Without speaking, even before she had taken off her hat, she flung herself into his arms, crying bitterly.

A definite fear came over him. He soothed her as best he could, led her to a chair, contrived to get her hat off, doing it very clumsily, and then asked,

"Now, Betty, you must tell me what is wrong."

"Dick, someone has been saying such horrid things about you."

"About me?"

"And I was foolish and wicked enough to believe them. Dicky, tell me they are not true."

"I'll have to know first what they are, won't I?"

"About you and Miss Florence?"

At the moment he thought only of her. His suffering was purely vicarious. She was half prepared to have him confirm the story, he could see that, but he wanted to prepare her still further.

"What made you believe the story?"

"Your postponing our marriage."

He understood in a flash that the conversation between himself and Kitty had been overheard.

"If I did not tell you the entire truth the other evening, Betty, it was for your sake, rather than for mine. Ultimately I expected to tell you. But I could not tell you just now."

"Then it is true?"

"Yes, Betty."

He offered no excuses in extenuation; in a little while she said:

"You shouldn't have lied to me the other evening. You should have told me the truth then."

"I couldn't; Betty, don't you understand, I was ashamed to speak to you about it?"

She rose and went to the window. She had stopped crying, even her sobbing had ceased. She leaned her throbbing forehead against the cold window pane and closed her eyes. All her little world seemed to crumble away, just to crumble until there was nothing left—no ideals, no love—no Dicky. She remembered how she had felt the day he had allowed her to realize that marriage to him would mean marriage—no less. She had quickly readjusted herself to the facts, shocking though they seemed to her. She now asked herself whether she could possibly readjust herself to this fact?

She came back to where he was sitting, his arm resting on the table. He was playing with a paper knife in the most commonplace, everyday manner, as if nothing of any moment had occurred. Richard had lived through this scene so frequently in imagination that, like all highly strung natures, his fancy had exhausted his capacity for suffering, had, in fact, exhausted every possibility, every phase of what might happen. What actually was happening was flat and stale compared with what he had been through in imagination. He did not wholly realize that Betty actually knew. He realized vividly that he was in a warm room after a long, windy, distressing walk, and that the paper knife he held in his hand was remarkably flexible for a steel cutter, and that the hatpin stuck out of Betty's hat at a ridiculous angle, because he had been afraid to push it far into the dainty, lacy fabric. Also he realized keenly that Betty was calling him Richard, not Dicky. That variation in no-

menclature appeared to him ridiculous. It did not seem like Betty to emphasize her displeasure by such trivial methods.

"Richard, I am going to move away from here."

He seemed to awaken from a dream.

"No, you're not. I've thought of that. I am going to move. Of course you cannot remain under the same roof with me now that everybody knows—but you have got to stay here. I want to know you are well taken care of by Mrs. Presbey."

They plunged into vigorous discussion. It was rather ridiculous, this chaffering about a side issue at such a dynamic moment, but it was characteristic of both and typical of their love for each other. Something serious had happened to their love; it was frightfully jarred and shocked and hammered out of all semblance to itself. But it was not broken. It was a ball of steel that had been flattened by the impact of a terrific blow—not a fragile vase that had been cracked and flawed by a fall.

"And I am going to leave Telfer's, Richard."

"Nonsense. I promise not to speak to you at all, except when absolutely necessary. If you wish, I'll see that you are transferred to the new branch at Forty-second Street. But I won't have you throw away a good position because I have been a skunk. Promise me —Betty!"

"I must, Richard."

He became vibrantly excited. "Betty!" He stormed up and down the room. "Betty!" the eloquent fingers were blazing a trail through the thick crop of hair. "Look here, you're not going to chuck the job because I got it for you, are you? You don't despise me quite as much as that, do you?"

"No, I don't think it is that yet, perhaps it is, partially;

I had not thought of it. I just cannot bear to see you. I want to get away—away from you—entirely."

"You're not going to throw me over for good?"

She did not reply.

"Of course I fully realize that for the time being, for some time to come you wouldn't want to see anything of me—but I hoped, I did sincerely hope that you would not break with me entirely. You're not going to, are you?"

"I don't know," said Betty. "I don't know where I am at. I'm, oh Dicky, how could you, how could you?" she cried in a sudden spasm of moral revulsion.

"That's what I've been asking myself all the time, Betty," he said, bitterly.

It occurred to him that he might partially exonerate himself by telling Betty how craftily he had been tempted. But his chivalry toward both women forbade his doing so. He could not denounce the woman who had led him into disgrace, nor could he insult Betty by telling her of that woman's fancied resemblance to herself.

"Betty, do you hate me?"

"Nothing you could do could make me hate you," she said with noble simplicity.

"Then why not promise that you will forgive me ultimately—a long time hence—five years hence, let us say?"

"I cannot promise that, if you mean marriage by forgiveness," she said. "Whatever I decide upon ultimately in that respect would have nothing whatever to do with my feelings for you. Those nothing can change. But I must make my decision independently of my sentiments for you. You have no right to ask anything of me at this moment—no right whatever."

He went to the door, flung himself into his overcoat, feeling for the first time in his life that his masculine bigness and strength was really an offense, a horrible

offense of some sort—feeling, too, oddly enough, a little resentful. He stood at the door, stroking his hat. It was horribly unjust, he told himself, that he could not plead the circumstances which would have helped his defense. How utterly Betty would ultimately condemn him, he could not guess. He knew her slow manner of arriving at conclusions. She required time for even little matters—how much more for such a vital matter as this? It might take her months, a year, before she arrived at a satisfactory conclusion, and all that time he would be enduring the pangs of remorse and suspense.

"Richard!"

"Yes, Betty?"

"It is only fair to tell you that it is going to make a big difference in one particular. I feel now that I was right in my attitude—in my belief that no chaste-minded woman can feel anything but affection."

"Betty!"

"I mean it. If you, who are so good and noble, can sink to such a depth through that feeling, then that feeling is what I always considered it, contemptible."

The thought carried her high and dry above the humanizing influences which had been refashioning and remodeling her soul, carried her back to her original position. Hereafter she would wrap herself in proud and suspicious contempt for men and women who did not concur with her views. She vowed her soul to eternal virginity.

"But Betty, darling—" he was in despair, and so excited that he could hardly talk.

"I'll never change now. Nothing you can say can alter me after this. If you prefer for this reason to break the engagement at once very well. If not, I must have time to think matters over. I may break it later on."

"I certainly do not wish to break it," Richard cried. "And if you break it I will go and kill myself. You are the only woman I ever loved and . . ."

"Evidently I am not."

"Betty, Betty, how can you be so cold?"

"Cold? I am glad I am cold," she said. "I glory in being cold."

His excitement became more intense. He entreated, implored, begged her he knew not what. The feminine part of his nature had never been so completely in the ascendant. He babbled as incoherently, and to as little purpose as a hysterical woman. His condition verged on hysteria. The thought that she would probably reject him made him conduct himself like a madman.

"Oh, why did this happen to me!" he cried.

"Happen to you? You speak as if you had met with a disaster—when, in truth——" she hesitated, blushed and stopped.

"In truth what?" he prompted.

"In truth it was the result of not suppressing that part of your nature. I am willing, on one condition, to promise you now that I will ultimately marry you."

"What is the condition?"

"That we will live together as brother and sister."

"Impossible, Betty!"

"There are many persons now-a-days, Dick, who believe in marriage for the sake of children only. I understand, of course, in that case, that it cannot be avoided—and I will allow motherhood,—if and whenever you may think it desirable to make a legitimate exception to the rule."

"Impossible," he cried again. "Impossible. I cannot argue with you on this point because I have never thought much about it. I have only felt that, well—that marriage is marriage."

"And where did your feelings lead you to?" she asked with scathing scorn.

"How terribly hard a good woman can be," he said.

"Then, Dick—women sometimes fall ill after marriage. How do I know that if I were ill you would not feel it incumbent on you to 'round out your love' elsewhere? As you have done now."

"For the love of heaven," he cried, his nervous hands interlacing and clenching themselves into knots,—"for the love of mercy, do you think I did this thing deliberately?"

"I beg of you, Richard, I desire to hear no details."

"I haven't given you any, have I?" he retorted passionately. "If we were married, and you were to fall ill, we would still be one flesh, wouldn't we? Nothing could change that fact, or alienate us."

"Yet, if I trusted you, undeliberately, you might repeat the offense you have just committed."

"If I did," he said, his self-respect getting the upper hand of his excruciating nervousness, "I would have the manliness to come to you and ask your forgiveness."

"Why didn't you have the manliness to come and do that now?"

"I refrained from telling you out of modesty, and respect for the woman, who is not yet my wife," he replied.

"Ah, you admit it, then? You will feel less respect for me after we are married?"

"No, no," he cried indignantly. "Only—after marriage, it would be natural for me to feel I could speak to you of anything."

He dashed about the room wildly, upsetting a chair as he strode from corner to corner, his fingers at work all the time with each other, with his hair, his brow. He had come to the end of the tether. He could endure no more. His horror of losing her was eclipsed for the

moment by the more immediate horror of breaking into tears. He seemed to feel tears trickling down from brain to eyes and scalp, and running up from throat and ears and nose. If they came there would be a flood of them. He bent every effort of his unnerved and tortured will to preserve at least an outward show of dignity.

Finally he come back to her.

"Betty, before I go, will you let me kiss you?"

She shook her head.

"Just once—once more."

"No, Richard, I cannot, I really cannot." She shrank from his eyes and from his outstretched hands. "You should not expect it," she said. "You cannot imagine how utterly loathsome it all seems to me."

"Loathsome!" He himself had used the word in his tumultuous self-communing after he had seen Dr. Moran. Loathsome! If he, the delinquent, a man, had felt it to be that, the word probably expressed his spotless Betty's sentiments only feebly. He stood irresolutely twirling his hat. He could think of nothing to say in his own behalf. After all, he held himself just as blamable as she. And yet he knew how he had been tempted, how the forbidden fruit had been dangled before his eyes and made to appear almost like unforbidden fruit. He knew that and she didn't. There was nothing more to be said.

He wanted to ask her to at least call him "Dick" before he left her room. But he could not frame the request. At last he went from the room without having spoken again.

## CHAPTER XXII

After many half hours of arguing, Betty promised to remain at Mrs. Presbey's, and not to leave Telfer's unless a suitable position was offered elsewhere. Unexpectedly, the suitable position offered within a week with a musical house that made a specialty of "renting out" accompanists to singers for practice work. As Richard had left Mrs. Presbey's within ten days after his confession, it happened that by the end of March Richard and Betty saw as little of each other as if she had been in the Klondike and he in Timbuctoo.

More than once before he left Mrs. Presbey's, Betty had been tempted to call out, "What does it matter, Richard, remain here." But she told herself that she owed it to morality in the abstract to maintain the stand she had taken. Pure minded though she was, she could not help trying to realize how the unspeakable thing had occurred. That a woman could tempt a man was a possibility which did not even remotely occur to her. Her youth, her sex, her upbringing, all made her regard the man as the logical wrong-doer, the woman as the wronged. The great mystery for her, then, was the fact that Dicky, so high-minded, so true a gentleman; Dicky, so delicately fibred that he refused to marry her while the thought of yielding herself to him as his wife remained in the least obnoxious to her, should have committed an offense which was abominable even when judged by the canons of those men and women who saw in matrimony not merely a justifiable institution or a

necessary evil, but something sacred and holy and pure. Bad enough for a man—how much lower for a woman? Thus Betty reasoned. The woman then was detestable, and Betty detested her fervently, without having formed any adequate notion of the part she had played.

In April she met Louise Reynolds on the street one day. Louise's gestures of greeting were always those of an affectionate puppy, and she literally fell on Betty's neck and embraced her. Nothing would do but Betty must spend the week-end with them. The arrangement was that the two girls in the afternoon were to go and see "The Sun-God," which, after a successful canine tour, had finally made its way to New York. They were to go "Dutch treat" and Betty was to accompany Louise to Brooklyn in the evening and stay until Monday morning. Louise, having more time than Betty, bought the tickets, which, of course, had to be procured in advance, but when Betty, between acts, offered to refund the money, Louise, with her flippant little giggle, demurred.

"Oh, Dad said I was to treat. He gave me a five-spot. We'll each get ourselves an orchid after the theatre, and a big box of Huyler's to eat to-morrow. Or do you prefer Repetti's?"

Betty, always desperately independent, felt uncomfortable, but had to let it go at that.

The Reynolds were extremely hospitable. They made Betty welcome and exacted her promise to spend Sunday with them frequently.

"Liberty Hall," said fat Mr. Reynolds, with a spacious gesture of the hand indicating the house and all it contained. "You must feel at liberty to come and go as you please." He patted Betty's little white hand between his enormous, red, calloused paws. Mrs. Reynolds unbent from her usual majesty of manner so far as to kiss Betty on both cheeks. Betty wondered why these folks,

on whom she had no claim whatever, should be so kind to her. Mrs. Reynolds remembered that Betty was particularly fond of chocolate pudding, with whipped cream, and had that for dessert. Mr. Reynolds recollected that Betty liked to read the *Evening Post* on Saturday afternoon, and the *Tribune* on Sunday, and had ordered both papers for her from his newsdealer. Louise gave her a handsome, hand embroidered collar similar to one she herself owned, which Betty had admired the day they met on the street. Even Louise's brother, a wild coltish-mannered boy of twelve, bought her a bag of freshly roasted peanuts which he had bought for a nickel previously obtained from his father by cajolery.

Yet, in spite of this big-hearted hospitality, this more than mere friendliness and courtesy, Betty did not really enjoy her stay at the Reynolds'. Mr. Reynolds' sole object in life, it seemed to her on the occasion of her first visit, was to make money for his family, and the family's sole object, apparently, was to spend it. Louise's career centered in attendance at parties, theatres, dances, and the attention bestowed upon her by her dancers, and her impartiality toward young men, who were young and had money to take her about, struck Betty as being in excessively bad taste. She hated herself for criticizing Louise, usually so sweet and kind to her, but she could not suppress a creeping sense of horror upon hearing Louise discuss the comparative advantages accruing to marriage with no less than three different young men.

Betty thought of her own supreme love for Richard, for she had had abundant time by then to realize that her devotion for him had in no way been impaired by the occurrence which had resulted in their temporary separation; and she wondered at Louise's lack of sensibility.

Betty had dreaded that the Reynolds might question her about Richard Pryce and her reason for leaving Telfer's. But they accepted the fact that she was in a different position from the one to which she had gone on leaving Penascapet, without comment, and Betty construed as tact what in reality was indifference. The Reynolds would do for her what they could; they gave her a rousing good time, according to their lights, which, after all, as Betty was to discover subsequently, was not so very different from her own; they would have helped her financially or provided her with raiment and food and shelter if she had been in need; but their good-will was expended in active benevolence, which, from kind-heartedness, not from delicacy, they did not set down as an eleemosynary sentiment. But Louise's friendship lacked that ultimate spiritual germ which makes the doings and thoughts and life of those we love as interesting when away from us, if not more so, as when with us.

Nevertheless, Betty spent another week end, and another, in the bosom of the Reynolds family. It was difficult, indeed, now they had rediscovered Betty, to evade their kindness without showing incivility in return for big-hearted friendliness.

One Saturday afternoon, at the suggestion of her father, who had placed the automobile at the girls' disposal, Louise took Betty through Prospect Park and then to the Brooklyn Institute of Art to look at Tissot's paintings illustrating the life of Christ.

"Now those paintings are really worth seeing," said Mr. Reynolds, emphasizing his words by smacking his lips. "I don't take any stock in pictoors as a rule. But these pictoors,—well, they are worth seeing, that's all."

"I've seen them twice," Louise objected.

"It won't hurt you to see them a third time," her father retorted. "Miss Garside, I imagine, will enjoy them."

This was a new side of Mr. Reynolds, and Betty wondered more than once that afternoon at the glimpse of the soul of Louise's father thus unexpectedly afforded her. Somehow she had never suspected that he might care for anything but the price of butter and eggs and his family's material comfort.

To see beautiful pictures always aroused in Betty the same mood of spiritual exaltation as to hear good music. And these five hundred odd paintings by Tissot, the conception and execution of which forms one of the most remarkable episodes in the history of art, raised her exaltation to a pitch which it heretofore had never ascended, and as she passed from picture to picture, familiarizing herself with the history of their genesis, there descended upon her one of those precious moods which deify the Spirit, which seem to disintegrate and remove what is gross and unworthy in the human heart, which apparently vaporizes the body, freeing the soul as nearly as possible from its earthly trammels.

Filled with a burning wish to portray pictorially the life of the Saviour, Tissot disdained to employ as models such human material as was obtainable from the Ghetto of France. No medieval monk, mewed in a perpetual monastery cell, gifted with talent for pen or brush and dedicating the better part of his life to the illumination of some missal, a book of hours or a gospel, and working upon the same in the vigils of the night by the dim light of rush candles brought a finer religious fervor, a more keen ecstatic frenzy, or as much penetrating spiritual insight to the exigencies of his work than did Tissot to his. A Frenchman of the Nineteenth Century, an artist of that epoch and race which had the hardihood to discountenance, plunder and humiliate the Church which had been a leading beneficent factor in the upbuilding of the Gallic nation, he possessed the genius and the re-

ligious fortitude in the face of all disturbing and distracting modern influences, to prepare himself for his work with a humility and patience and a far-reaching comprehension of detail which may have been equalled in the world of science, but which is matchless in the world of art. For over a decade he made his home in the Holy Land, believing that the Jewish types seen there retained in greater purity, with only a trifling accretion of spurious modern traits, the habits, customs, manners and appearance of the Hebrews who flourished in Palestine when Jesus lived. He permeated himself with the spirit of the Old and New Testament. He studied the atmospheric conditions of Palestine at morning, noon and dusk, and at night as well; he visited innumerable abodes, hovels as well as the homes of prosperous merchants, to glean what hints he might that would prove of service in the unparalleled task he had set himself.

The monumental work he achieved is the apotheosis of patience linked to comprehension; of the religious instinct wedded to the joy of the artist. No other work can compare with it, except Tissot's own Old Testament paintings conceived and executed under similar conditions. Michael Angelo in his frescoes, Raphael in his madonnas, Leonardo da Vinci, Fra Filippo Lippi, Carlo Dolce and Correggio, achieved beautiful and divine masterpieces of religious painting. That these masterpieces transcend Tissot's work in splendor and vigor of workmanship, in magnificence of coloring and draughtsmanship of the human figure, in no way minimizes or cheapens the glory and marvel of Tissot's accomplishment. Half of those early Italian artists allowed their full-blooded joy in human flesh and human form and human life and human love to divest their work of the finer religious significance, while the other half, in escaping the robustness of their age took refuge in allegorical symbol-

ism, which as often as not, made of their madonnas and saints and angels mere lovely dolls invested in all the circumstance and pomp in which their age effloresced.

Tissot alone has thrown the veil of subtle enchantment arising from hallowed religious traditions reverently regarded and idealized over his work. The robust, sensuously-living Scriptural characters lose none of their robustness, none of their characteristically healthy animal life, in his hands. Nevertheless he has contrived, by some trick of genius, to represent their robustness in such a light that it does not repel, while their sensuousness appears debrutalized because the very foreignness of their appurtenances, the intense insistence upon the minutest detail of dress and race and habitat, removes them so far from our own plane and ken that we do not identify the passions that moved them as being the same as the passions that move us,—glossed over, refined and modified by the passing of twenty centuries.

Perhaps none but a Frenchman, quick-witted in his religiosity and innately courteous with that courtesy which, though it may offend against morals, never offends against good taste, could have done this.

The spiritual atmosphere which enmeshed the paintings enchanted Betty. One painting particularly held her spell-bound. Innumerable hands,—strata upon strata of ghostly arms and hands and fingers stretch out toward the recumbent figure of the Saviour,—and the intense appeal of those outstretched entreating hands, surrounded by and rising out of a bluish mist which appears as a vast luminous shadow, was eloquent as a prayer.

Thoughts of Richard ran continually in Betty's mind. Every art gallery visited by her heretofore had been visited in his company, and suddenly it seemed to her that those tapering, supplicating, imploring hands were stretching out toward herself in appeal for Richard. A

feeling of sanctity invaded her. At that moment she realized that Richard was carrying his punishment about with him; that the suffering of the innocent from whatsoever cause, can never approach the suffering of those who know themselves guilty.

The pleading, ghostly hands haunted her. She saw them in every shifting cloud picture of the sky, in the indistinct outlines of trees and houses in the lowering twilight.

"Louise," she said suddenly, "I cannot play bridge to-night, I really can't. Will you excuse me if I go to my room after dinner?"

"Why don't you want to play bridge?" Louise asked, comfortably.

"I don't want to erase the feeling left by those pictures," Betty answered, honestly.

Louise thought this very funny. She repeated Betty's words as a huge joke at the supper table. Mrs. Reynolds smiled serenely. Tom gave a fair imitation of his sister's giggle and was reprimanded by mother and sister. But Mr. Reynolds said:

"Miss Betty is quite right. I am not going to play bridge to-night, either."

"Oh, Papa," said Louise, "you never play at my parties, you know."

"Well, Louise, it is kind of you to excuse me," her parent continued. "I vote, Miss Betty, that you and I go off alone and enjoy ourselves after our own misunderstood fashion. What do you say, my dear?"

And so, after dinner, the old man and the young girl sallied forth together, Betty having not the remotest notion where Mr. Reynolds was taking her. Tom, after the fashion of the Twentieth Century American schoolboy, demanded to know "where are Pop and Miss Betty going to elope to."

They were within a block of their destination when Mr. Reynolds remarked:

"My dear, I am taking you to hear Handel's 'Messiah,' sung by a local Oratorio Society. I hope that pleases you."

"Oh, it's angelic of you," said Betty.

"Tut, tut, wait till you hear them sing and then say that if you please," said Mr. Reynolds. "I've not missed one of their oratorios in years. Oh, I know they don't sing like trained performers, and the orchestra needs polish and practise, but I enjoy these oratorios as I enjoy no other music, and I will tell you why, Miss Betty." He explained to her that the young men and women taking part in the chorus, were not paid for their services. They joined the society for no other purpose than the joy of singing the music of the master. Most of them worked during the week. There were teachers and clerks, stenographers and shop girls. Every Sunday afternoon during the winter months they met and practiced for no other reason than that they humbly loved the beautiful music which they sang in public once or twice a year. That was the right spirit in which to approach any art, wasn't it? "And so," Mr. Reynolds concluded, "when anyone tells me that religion and idealism are dead among us—when folks start palavering in that strain to me, I always refer them to the five hundred young men and women of this oratorio society, and the thousands of applicants who are turned away every year because the ranks are full. And this is the twentieth century, too."

Betty looked in surprise at the butter merchant. She remembered how she had misjudged him when at Penascapet. She recalled her wonder that Emma and Louise should come and kiss and hug him as they invariably did when he put in appearance on Saturday afternoon.

Suddenly she felt that if he were her father, she would feel the very same affection for the unkempt, rough-and-ready figure beside her that Louise did. She had never known her father, and she felt now, for the first time, the wish that she might have known him. She remembered, too, how bitterly she had resented Mr. Reynolds' suggestion that if she would make her home with his family during the winter, he and his wife would "marry her off." The subtle influences which, during the last year had been at work upon her, made her regard the suggestion in an entirely different light than heretofore. Then it had seemed vulgar in intention and gross in expression. Now it seemed a kindly intention clumsily worded, because she realized now that Mr. Reynolds had wished to help her to what he considered the supreme good in life for a woman.

Although she was familiar with the score, Betty had never heard the Messiah. The wonderfully beautiful music, worthy to be sung by the angelic hosts, painted by Fra Filippo Lippi, completed what the afternoon's experience had begun. As she stood with the remainder of the audience during the singing of the Hallelujah, every trace of anger and resentment and bitterness was wiped from her heart. She forgave Richard freely. Henceforth it was only a matter of time until she would write him.

On the way home, Mr. Reynolds said: "Now we won't tell them where we were. Louise will be plaguing you all day to-morrow to tell her. Just plague her back," and at the breakfast table the next morning, sure enough, Louise began teasing:

"You might have least come into the parlor last night, instead of going to bed, Betty, when you came in."

"Where were you last night, anyhow?" Tom demanded. "You and Pop. Ma, I should think you'd keep an eye on the gov'nor."

"Ssss" said Louise, pretending to disapprove of her brother's question because she wanted to talk herself.

"Yes," she said, "where were you? I guess Father took you to a vaudeville show," and as Betty merely smiled instead of answering, Louise asked:

"Mother, do *you* know where they were?"

Mrs. Reynolds smiled her inscrutably majestic smile. She was serving her spouse to a second helping of two-inch deep French omelette.

"Sugar, father? Jelly?"

"Both," Tom answered for his father, unreproved.

"Well," giggled Louise, "if you won't tell, you won't. I am going to dress for church." She went out of the room, and began playing rag-time in the parlor, which was located directly above the dining-room.

"Tom, go and tell Louise to stop," Mrs. Reynolds commanded. "Louise knows her father detests ragtime at breakfast."

Tom departed only to reappear immediately. Through an inch wide aperture of the open door, he hurled the information into the room that "Louise says the ragtime is ragtime by Wagner and therefore not ragtime at all."

"Oh, let the child play what she likes," growled Mr. Reynolds. "Next Sunday, I'll bring cotton downstairs to stuff in my ears so I can read my paper in peace. Tom, you rascal, go and blacken your boots this minute, or I won't take you with me to the barber shop."

Tom began to whine. Why couldn't the "ginny" in front of the barber shop black his boots while he was waiting for his father? His father argued with him, Tom "answered back" through an enlarged aperture—his father became impatient and flustered, Tom tearful.

Only then did Mrs. Reynolds see fit to interpose. Without disturbing her habitual serene smile, she said majestically, in the voice of a tragedy queen:

"Go."

Tom went.

"Thank heaven," said Mr. Reynolds, "now I can read my paper." He was soon deep in the mysteries of a double deck in the magazine section of his paper.

"My dear Miss Betty," said Mrs. Reynolds, "my husband asked me to hand you this little check. He has just handed me a check for the same amount to spend on Louise's summer outfit, and he wished you to have the pleasure of buying what you would like for yourself."

She pushed the check across the table to Betty, and rose to leave the table. Betty stammered.

"It is awfully kind of you—but really, I could not think of accepting it, you know. I . . ."

Mrs. Reynolds turned on her way to the kitchen.

"You will have to talk to Mr. Reynolds about it," she said. "I merely acted as envoy." And she left the room.

Betty was alone with Mr. Reynolds. She repeated to him what she had said to his wife. He laughed at her; Betty became more insistent in her refusal; he protested, so did Betty. Ultimately he declared:

"I rather like you for being so very independent. But, look here, my girl, if you ever need money, something unforeseen—sickness, loss of position—may arise, and in that event I want you to promise to come to us—to my wife or myself, for assistance."

"I promise," said Betty, and Mr. Reynolds, without another word, threw the check for two hundred and fifty dollars into the roaring Baltimore heater, saying jocularly:

"That's the first time my signature has ever been refused."

By the beginning of May, the Reynolds had closed their house. Mrs. Reynolds had been in rather bad health for some time past and her husband was taking

her abroad to Karlsbad or Bad Nauheim for a cure. Louise joined a party of friends on a Cook's Tour through Yosemite, Grand Canyon and Yellowstone, and Tom was expedited to some school-camp in the Adirondacks. Before leaving, Louise extracted a promise from Betty to write her, promising to deluge her with letters in return, and at first post cards came in thick and fast. After a while they diminished in numbers, and a little later they ceased altogether. Volatile Louise, as her father said, did not forget her friends. She merely forgot to remember them.

At the end of April, Madame Hudrazzini returned from Chicago, where she had been singing in opera on an especial engagement. Before leaving for Europe for her summer's holiday, she was to give a series of recitals in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. Betty spent several evenings with her in a charming apartment she had furnished for herself. Madame Hudrazzini's largess was very different from that of the Reynolds household. There everything hinged on money. The entire family discussed money matters—dressmaker and grocer's bills, the relative cost of steam and hot air heating with the most charming candor and unconcern for the guest at their table. The house was overdecorated and overfurnished throughout. Every article of furniture—the massively carved mahogany sideboard as well as the rose-patterned Axminster carpet conveyed the mute message to the observant beholder—"I cost so and so much." At Madame Hudrazzini's rigid simplicity reigned supreme. Spindle legged Sheraton sideboard with knife urns, diamond-paned Hepplewhite bookcase, Adam chairs and table, high-boys and low-boys, as well as the Oriental rugs of unobtrusive tints, were so mellowed and subdued by the passing of years that the money they had cost and into which they might be con-

verted at any moment, was wholly lost sight of, the potential financial value being eclipsed by the aroma of paramount and enduring worth which hangs about articles which were old when our grandsires were young.

Madame Hudrazzini, unlike the Reynolds, did not hesitate to question Betty concerning Dick. She had heard of their estrangement through Direktor Markheim. who had the story from old Mr. Telfer. At the end of a delightful five-course luncheon in her own apartments, she broached the subject.

"*Carissima,*" she said, "I am desolated by the idea that you may have broken with your young man for good. Not so?"

"Nothing definite was agreed upon," said Betty. "I could not bear to see him for a while. I was so horribly hurt. I wanted to be alone."

"He does not know where he stands with you?"

"No."

"And he made no effort to see you?"

"He wouldn't, you know, having tacitly agreed not to."

Madame Hudrazzini became thoughtful.

"It is not," she said, "that I wish to frighten you. But you have done a foolish thing. You may lose him by thus sending him from you."

"Dick will never turn from me," said Betty proudly. "In spite of everything, we belong to each other."

"Men are men. He has shown that once. Write him to-morrow—to-night, *carissima,* and bring him to your side."

"I am not afraid of losing him," Betty said with stubborn pride. "I would not write him for that reason. But I have forgiven him—and in a few days I will tell him so."

"Ah," said the Italian, "have a care, *carissima.* Do not make him—how do you say—eat too much humble

pie. Men do not like to eat humble pie as a dessert to follow their misdeeds."

"He has eaten it already," said Betty composedly.

"You are hard—hard and cold as marble, little one. You will have to change. Your Richard loves you now, but men are men, and, believe me, *carissima*, there are times in every woman's life when she must overlook."

Betty looked at the great prima donna curiously. She remembered that the widow Hudrazzini had been faithful to the memory of her husband for ten long years; and that husband, she could not but infer from the complexion of Madame Hudrazzini's remarks, had been faithless to her, perhaps more than once. A sudden shivering fear of men and their ways struck to her heart. Were they really all like that? Even her Dick? Her Anglo-Saxon blood rose in sudden hot revolt against that form of deception and moral laxness which the Latin woman accepted so tranquilly, and condoned.

"I will never overlook," she said almost viciously. "And I will not change. I want to remain as I am—hard and cold."

"This one offense you should overlook," pleaded the great singer. "See, *carissima*, you are not even married. Before marriage, a man may sow his wild oats."

Betty shook her head in vigorous negation.

"The same law for man and woman," she said.

"No, no; love is a very different thing for man than for woman. A woman gives every fiber of herself to the man she loves; not so the man. And then, *carissima*, we women must be a little bit better than men—there is the pleasure of forgiving, you know."

"It is a pleasure I will gladly forego," said Betty.

In spite of her brave pretense at fearlessness in regard to being sure of Dick, Madame Hudrazzini had stirred to

life in her heart a vague uneasiness that became more and more specific as the days went by.

And now, just because she was uneasy, she would not communicate with him. Finally, after much communing with herself, she telephoned to Telfer's and asked for Mr. Pryce, without giving her name. She was told he was west and would return some time in June. More disappointed than she liked to admit, she rang off without asking for his address. It occurred to her subsequently that she might address a letter to him to Telfer's marked, "Please forward." But, after all, she decided to await his return and tell him orally that she had wiped the past off the slate.

She thought things over a good deal at night, and began carefully reading the scores of the standard operas. She happened upon Tannhaeuser. She remembered the deep impression that opera had made upon her, but when she remembered Earlcote's belief that sin was necessary for the growth and maturing of the soul, she threw the book aside in disgust. How was sin to further the growth of Dicky's soul, for furthering meant helping, and how was Dicky being helped by his lapse? The thought of sin, in connection with herself, never occurred to her.

Earlcote came to see her one day in her office. Ever since the evening on which he had turned over to Kitty the Kasi-Nook, he had had a private detective shadow Betty. But he feigned ignorance of everything that had transpired.

"Well," he said, smiling sourly, "so I have found you at last."

Betty nerved herself to answer lightly.

"That sounds as if you had been looking for me a long time."

"I've been looking for you ever since you disappeared

from Telfer's. I cannot allow the little song-bird I want to snare to get too far beyond my reach."

All Betty's fear and dislike for this man, which had been forced into the background of her thoughts by her recent trouble with Dick, came rushing back.

"You will never snare this particular song-bird," she said coldly.

Earlcote laughed—the low, sneering, derisive laugh that always made Betty ache to strangle him.

"We will see," he said.

"Did you wish to see me about anything in particular, Mr. Earlcote? Otherwise—I am busy."

"Oh, come, come—surely, you are not going to turn me away with such a scant welcome as all that. I have had a great time locating you. Your whipper-snapper refused point-blank to give me your address."

"Really?"

"He did. Still too much in love with him to think of a career for yourself?"

"Certainly."

"Yes or no?"

Instead of replying, Betty attempted to look bored, but her effort was not a signal success.

"I fancied," Earlcote continued, "I fancied you had asked him not to give your address to me."

"And what made you think that, Mr. Earlcote?"

"You are going to be angry, furiously angry, with me when I tell you. I had a notion that you left Telfer's because you were afraid of me—hoping, you know, that I would lose your trail."

Betty was too amazed to be angry. Finally she said:

"Absurd."

"I see I was mistaken. That's humiliating for me, I assure you. I was enormously flattered to think that your terror of me had reached such a climax."

"I give you my word," said Betty, laughing, "I do not believe that I have thought of you once these last weeks."

"Worse and worse," Earlcote smiled wanly. "Think of me now. Or rather, think of your voice and your future. Think of the dresses, jewels, carriages, horses; think of everything your voice will be able to procure for you once it has been cultivated."

"I desire only such dresses, jewels, carriages, horses as my husband will some day be able to give me."

Earlcote looked at her searchingly.

"Look here, Miss Garside," he said, "I know what has happened through Mr. Telfer—why you broke your engagement to Mr. Pryce."

"You are mistaken. Our engagement is not broken—merely suspended indefinitely."

"I thought you a girl of more spirit than to go on loving a man who has so far forgotten himself as Richard Pryce did."

Betty had been sitting with her face turned sideways to Earlcote. She worked while she talked, but now she abruptly dropped her work, swinging around in her revolving chair, and, facing Earlcote, her arms crossed over her bosom, prepared to have her say. Again she felt the inexplicable access of a more mature personality than her own, which came to her so often in Earlcote's presence. The very thoughts she uttered when she began speaking did not seem her own. But as she continued it seemed to her that they had lain cradled in the chaos from which thought is born and brought forcibly to the threshold of speech and crystallized into precise nuggets of thought, by Earlcote's arraignment.

"Mr. Earlcote," she said, "in spite of all your worldly wisdom, in spite of your vaunted knowledge of love, I think you know nothing whatever of its real nature. 'Real love endureth all things,' all trials and sorrows.

Because Richard has done wrong, do you think I could turn from him? If I were capable of doing that, I would never have loved him. If anything, I feel I must love him all the more because of his wrongdoing. Enemies and the public guardians of morality judge us and condemn us, and if love were content to do the same, were content to judge and condemn, wherein would love differ from hate and from justice? Love, instead of judging actions, sympathizes with temptations and failings—gets the viewpoint of the culprit, and forgives. Richard is everything to me, and I know that I am first in the world to him always, although I have not seen him for months. You may sneer all you wish. I know what I know. The voice of the heart tells me this is so, and I believe it."

"His sex calls to you—that is why you forgive him," said Earlcote brutally.

"I did not suppose you could understand. You are as incapable of rising to my views, as I, I am happy to say, am unable to lower myself to an understanding of yours."

Earlcote grew a trifle paler; his jaws moved convulsively for a moment.

"Why do you despise me so?" he asked.

"Because you are bad, evil. Oh, I know nothing of you or your life further than what you have told me. But you cheated Richard out of his chance, and a man who can do that is—well—weak and contemptible."

"Instead of flinging words at me, let me propose something to you—a bargain."

"Thank you, none of your bargains, Mr. Earlcote."

"Bona-fide?"

"I will not be your pupil, if that is what you want to suggest again. Why, even if I were ambitious, I would

not consent to have anything to do with you. Nothing. I despise you too heartily."

She uncrossed her arms, which she had held firmly clasped across her bosom, as if to protect the tabernacle of her heart, in which her love lay enshrined, against the malevolence of her interlocutor.

"That reminds me," Betty continued, "I still have the set of half bills which I was foolish enough to pick up at your house. Will you allow me to return them to you now?"

"Do with them what you wish, you little love-sick fool!"

She had made Earlcote angry at last. His cadaverous face was livid. "Your self-conceit is insufferable. You pride yourself on your coldness, your austerity, your unselfishness, your sinlessness—yes, not only on your sinlessness but on your incapacity for sinning. You'll be brought low, yes, into the dust, my fine lady, and, mark my words, you'll suffer! Heavens and earth, how you will suffer! On the whole, I am glad you refuse to be my pupil. I would have been out both time and money and, in all probability, have had nothing to show for it. I don't believe your voice will ever amount to anything anyhow."

"The grapes are sour," Betty was stung into retorting.

Earlcote laughed harshly.

"You haven't the brains or the heart to vivify your voice," he went on. "It's a spiritless toy, and while you obstinately continue to bolster up your pride in being different from the rest of the human race, in being immune from the emotions which sway the rest of humanity, your voice will not change."

He motioned to his Hindus, and if they had not been there to support him he would have fallen. His fury had sapped his vitality, such as it was. Fascinated, and

in silence, Betty saw the Earlcote servants support him from her office.

Earlcote's rage on passing left him weak-kneed and nauseated. The temperature maintained in his automobile was eighty degrees, but in spite of this torrid heat he had a nervous chill on entering the vehicle. He was furious that his plans had miscarried; furious that he had parted with the Kasi-Nook without having something to show in return; furious with the "little love-sick fool"; furious, most of all, with himself for being furious. His enfeebled health did not permit him to indulge in paroxysms of rage with impunity.

Arrived at home, he sat moodily in the gathering dusk settling down over the vast aviary. His pet, the pink-legged flamingo, came and, unnoticed by its master, begged for tidbits. The kingfishers flapped and screamed, the cockatoos chattered, the monkeys palavered, the palms stirred with ghostly, phantomlike movements in the air, vaguely set into motion by the twilight activity of the birds. And the man who owned all this splendor sat in a forlorn little heap, thinking sinister thoughts and incubating sinister plans.

His mind, lashed into desperate resolution, traveled along unbelievable lines. There lay the pool where the herons and kingfishers and flamingoes lived. The water, changed day by day, was sweet and pure. Remaining unchanged for a few weeks, it would be stagnant, impure, putrid. Young oysters placed there, as they waxed fat and succulent, would become infected as well. Infected oysters eaten by a guest—by Richard Pryce, and Mr. Telfer, if asked on a suitable pretext, would send him—would mean probably typhoid. Typhoid, since Richard was in relatively poor condition, would inevitably mean death.

It was a tempting plan. The chances were ninety-nine

to a hundred that it would not miscarry. And once Richard was out of the way, Betty would work hard, and her voice would be his to train, to fashion, to mould.

But Earlcote was afraid to put this plan into execution. He had all the amateur criminal's fear of the law. He did not fear for Earlcote, the individual, the man who had been trampled upon by an elephant; he feared for Earlcote the musician. It was insufferable to think that the lustrous name of the unequalled, unmatchable pianist of all history should be tarnished by a crime.

The languid energy of Earlcote's hybrid blood during his sojourn in India had become tinctured with the invincible patience of the Asiatic. In India he had learned the secret of waiting stealthily until opportunity throws the ball of fortune into one's lap. He had learned that sooner or later, the phalanx of each man's destiny admits an opening wedge through which his enemies, if ever alert, can penetrate.

As the clock struck seven Earlcote reached his decision. He would wait. And fortune was to favor him sooner than he had anticipated in a way curiously in consonance with his secret wishes.

## CHAPTER XXIII

May passed in a whirl of golden light and spring tremors. June came in dressed in burning gold and the pink of magnolia blossoms and cherry trees.

Coming home one Saturday afternoon, Betty was impelled by the strange ardors of the season and the mingling of spiritual turmoil and bodily lassitude, to arrive at the mighty decision that she would telephone Richard early the next morning, for, meeting Telfer's cashier, Mr. Hoffman, on the street the week before, she had heard through him that Richard was back in New York.

When she entered the house Mrs. Presbey met her with a grave face.

"I am forced to break a promise I gave Richard a long time ago," she began rather sententiously.

"Why? What is it?"

"Before you came to live here Richard made some changes in your room. Among other things, he rented a piano for you."

"Do you mean that he has been paying for the piano I am using all this time?"

Mrs. Presbey nodded.

"Well, he didn't pay for it this week, and the collector came here to say that unless the rental is paid by next Wednesday, the piano will be removed."

"Dick is in town—that means that he is ill. Have you telephoned the office?"

"No."

Betty rushed from the room and to the telephone.

"Give me—" she stumbled so hastily over the number that she was forced to repeat it three times.

"Is this Telfer's? This is Miss Garside. Will you tell me whether Mr. Pryce is ill? What? Typhoid pneumonia? Where? Post Graduate or Bellevue, you don't know which? Thank you."

She rang off and came back into the room.

"Oh, Mrs. Presbey," she gasped, "he has typhoid pneumonia! and he has been in a hospital for five days."

Both women sat very still for a moment. Suddenly Mrs. Presbey said in an emphatic tone:

"Typhoid! Well, his stomach never was strong, and I suppose since he left here he has been living on regular boarding-house fare. I can only say it was a pity he wasn't allowed to remain in my house, which, he always said, poor boy, was the only home he had ever known."

"Oh, Mrs. Presbey," cried Betty, stung by the older woman's remarks. "I didn't ask him to go. I asked him to stay. I wanted to leave here instead."

"All I can say is I wish I had never consented to have *you* come here."

"You—didn't want me to come?" stammered Betty.

"I certainly did not."

Mrs. Presbey closed her lips tautly, closed them with a snap, like a steel spring closing upon some poor, trapped thing. Betty caught her breath sharply.

"Oh," she said, "I had no idea of that. You've been so kind to me, you know. I never guessed."

"I didn't want you to come," Mrs. Presbey continued, her wrath gathering rapidly, "because I had a feeling, a premonition, that no good would come of it. Although I didn't anticipate the thing that actually happened."

"What do you mean," stammered Betty, "by 'the thing that actually happened'?"

"I mean—that you would drive Richard into what happened to him by your heartlessness and coldness."

"Heartless? I? Why, Mrs. Presbey!"

"You didn't in the least appreciate his honesty in not allowing you to marry him without telling you the truth," Mrs. Presbey continued. "Many a man wouldn't have told, would have lied himself out of it, would have married the girl to whom he was engaged. But Richard acted honorably with you, and small thanks he got for it, I must say."

Betty sat very still.

"Mrs. Presbey," she said, "I never wavered in my love for Dick—never. And now—nothing matters but Dick's pulling through."

Mrs. Presbey softened. "What are you going to do?" Betty's distress made the old lady pity the girl. Her anger against Betty vanished.

"Do you think they will allow me to stay there, in the hospital with him?"

"Hardly."

"But I cannot stand being away from him, now he is ill! I want to look after him; to take care of him."

"Ah! you do love him after all."

"Love him? I adore him."

"Hm."

"Oh, Mrs. Presbey," Betty continued, choking back the tears that were rising, "I must be near Dick. I have almost a hundred dollars saved up. If it takes my last penny, I must be near Dick. What do you think they will charge me for my board in the hospital?"

"You cannot go to the hospital," said Mrs. Presbey with sudden gentleness, "and you had better keep your hundred dollars. You'll be needing the money for odds and ends when he begins to rally. I think, Miss Betty, if he can be moved, we'll bring him home."

But Dr. Moran, who had had Richard removed to the hospital on finding he had typhoid, would not allow him to be taken away. There followed weeks of heart-breaking, soul-harrowing suspense. The hospital was so crowded that Betty was unable to obtain a room in it, even if she had been able to pay for one, which, on inquiry, she found would have been out of the question. Every leisure moment was consumed in trips to the hospital. On such evenings, when she was unable to see Dick because his temperature was high, she sat in impotent anxiety in the waiting-room for hours, hoping blindly to receive word of a change for the better before going home for the night.

Then there was the indescribable, overwhelming, maddening agony of each seventh day, on which the crisis, sooner or later, was bound to occur. Once, on the twenty-first day, Dick was so low that it seemed as if the crisis was actually at hand. But the dreaded day passed without a change for better or worse. It seemed to Betty, in the week that intervened between the twenty-first and twenty-eighth day, that the uncertainty was worse than any possible certainty could be, and she prayed fervently that the approaching twenty-eighth day would mean a turn in the tide. But when the twenty-eighth day dawned, she realized that rather than lose her Dicky she would live in uncertainty all her life. It was, after all, a week later that Dick finally began to rally and was declared out of danger. In another fortnight they brought him home to Mrs. Presbey's.

Betty herself was worn to a shadow. Deep circles were formed under her eyes; her complexion, always pale, was now white as alabaster; but her heart was filled with blithe songs, though eyes and limbs were alike heavy from sleepless nights.

When Richard was taken away from the hospital Dr.

Moran asked the Superintendent to return Richard's valuables, left in the office for safekeeping, to Betty. Among the valuables were Richard's bank book, and two unopened letters bearing the Telfer imprint. An accounting that showed that Richard, on the day he was brought to the hospital, had paid the sum of three hundred dollars by special check on his savings bank. He had been there seven weeks, at sixty dollars a week, making the total amount of his indebtedness four hundred and twenty dollars. In other words, one hundred and twenty dollars were still due the hospital. Betty went to her bank and drew her entire savings, amounting to but a few dollars more than the sum she paid the hospital to clear Richard's indebtedness.

There was nothing heroic in her doing so. If it had been necessary for her to sacrifice her savings for Richard, she would gladly have done so, but she believed that Richard's bank account showed a considerable balance, and she drew her own money to pay the hospital bill merely because the physician had warned her against taxing Richard's nervous system and mind in any way for some weeks to come. Betty had Richard's bank book in her possession, but she did not open it, nor did she open the letters for him from Telfer's. Near and close as she was to him, a fine sense of chivalry, more unusual in women than in men, made her shrink, even at such a moment, from reading his correspondence or looking at his financial accounts.

Betty obtained a week's leave of absence without pay, after Richard's return to Mrs. Presbey's, as Mrs. Presbey was unable to assume the entire burden of waiting on him, and Betty figured that it would have been more expensive to engage a trained nurse at twenty-five dollars per week, than to forfeit her own salary of eighteen dollars, apart from the sentimental

reason that she wanted to be near her Dick during this first week of his convalescence at home.

Dr. Moran took Betty aside on the second day of Richard's removal and said to her:

"Pryce has been a pretty sick man, and he had not been in first-class physical condition for some time before he fell ill."

"Yes, I know," murmured Betty.

"You understand, Miss Garside, that you will have to get him out of the city just as soon as you can."

"When do you think we can move him?"

"We'll *have* to be able to move him a week from to-day or to-morrow."

Something in Dr. Moran's voice sent a wave of apprehension through Betty.

"Why, what do you mean?" she stammered.

"I mean that, although we have pulled him through the actual disease, he is in such a feeble condition that the uphill fight back to health is going to take months—months. It's July now. He won't be fit to go to work before December—at the very earliest. And he has got to have good care and cheerful company. If he is to pull through—someone has got to go away with him to give him constant attention—either a nurse, or yourself, for he is going to require continual care."

"I suppose I can go with him," faltered Betty.

"That would be best. Pryce had something on his mind when he fell ill—I mean about your falling out."

"Yes," Betty assented, blushing.

"And that didn't tend to give him a better chance. If you can manage to go away with him, it means that the battle is half won. I am not an alarmist, but it is absolutely essential that you get him away as quickly as possible."

"Where is he to go?"

"I'll give you a couple of addresses—a farmhouse at Pocono, and a very delightful large boarding-house in the Adirondacks. The latter would be the better place to go to, as they have all modern equipments, steam heat, hot water, in fact, all the essential conveniences."

He wrote down the addresses for Betty, and handed them to her.

"By the way," he said, "I don't suppose you young folks are very rich. You needn't worry about my bill. Richard can pay it after he gets back to work, some time at the end of next year. I am very fond of Richard, and if I were a little richer myself I would offer to help you out with a little ready cash. But I dare say you can manage."

"Yes, I dare say we can," said Betty.

Again Dr. Moran opened the door, and again he closed it.

"You'll be sure to get him off within a week?" he asked, insistently. "He is very weak, and the weather is devilish."

"I'll be ready within a week," Betty said. She had the feeling of delivering herself blindly into the hands of a juggernaut destiny as she made the simple statement.

The door closed at last behind the physician.

Betty sat down on the lowest step of the stairs, and folded her hands over her knees. How fluently she had repeated that they would be able to manage to get away, but the future loomed before her excited imagination like some preposterous mountain, iceberg or volcano, ready to crush both of them beneath its overtoppling weight. Neither she nor Richard working, and five months' board to be paid for both of them!

Inactivity became insufferable. She darted nimbly upstairs, into Richard's room. He had fallen asleep. The

room was darkened, but in spite of the four large pieces of ice placed near the bed to cool the temperature of the room, the frightful heat and humidity which had made of the city a sort of purgatorial torture chamber for the past weeks, seemed to penetrate even to this sequestered room. The throbbing arteries of the city through which flowed incessant tumult and truceless noise sent tokens of the city's ruthless activity into the sickroom. Each truck that lumbered past, every electric car clanging heavily on noisy wheels, sent a cruel jar of apprehension through Betty. Would Dick waken? She trembled at sound of a dishpan clattering from the stove to the kitchen floor two floors below, and of an ironing board falling heavily upon a washtub, the noise of the latter being borne across the narrow backyard from an opposite apartment house.

Betty knelt down beside Richard. She did not touch his hand or his face, but, kneeling, stared at him in mute anguish. Dick, her Dick, so strong, so well a short time ago, turned into this living skeleton; she buried her face in her hands and wept silently. Her tears ceased as abruptly as they had begun.

"Ah, Dick—" she did not whisper the words—but merely formed them on her lips. "Oh, Dick—you're mine, you belong to me, you shan't die."

She tiptoed across the room and with nervous fingers began searching for the two unopened envelopes from Telfer's, and for Richard's bank book. Once a comb scraped the wood of the drawer in which it lay, and she turned in an agony of fear to see whether she had awakened Dick. She wanted to stop and defer her search, but a blind, unreasonable and unreasoning fear had taken possession of her and drove her on. Finally she found what she was looking for. Hastily she ripped open the envelopes. Each one, as she had surmised, con-

tained a check for Richard's salary—thirty-five dollars. They bore the dates of the first two weeks of Richard's illness, and the later check was accompanied by a note from Hoffman, the cashier, stating curtly that Mr. Telfer, before leaving New York, had issued instructions to pay Mr. Pryce two weeks' salary, and to suspend his name from the payroll.

Betty's hand shook as she opened Dick's bank book. She knew, he himself had told her, that the Europe Fund amounted to a little over a thousand dollars at the time he met her. She remembered with a pang that he had insisted on spending most of his salary on giving her pleasure after she had come to New York. It was possible, after their rupture, that he had resumed his frugal habits.

His bank book showed credits in round figures amounting to eleven hundred dollars. Drawn against this were the three hundred dollars he had paid the hospital in advance, and an earlier amount of eight hundred dollars. The balance remaining in the bank was a mere bagatelle, five or six dollars, which he had allowed to remain in his name with the evident intention of not discontinuing the account.

The item of eight hundred dollars fascinated Betty. She gazed long and earnestly at the business-like figures as if some occult power dwelt in them, to admit her to some carefully guarded, but not disgraceful secret of Dicky's soul. Suddenly it occurred to her to look at the date. It was August fourteenth. She had come to New York the following week. What did it mean? Like a flash, a suspicion swept across her mind. Noiselessly she crept from Dick's room and entered her own, and now she stood in speechless consternation because of her own stupid blindness. Dicky's room was shabby and threadbare—the furniture was a medley of chairs,

an odd wash-stand, an odd bureau and a bed. No two pieces in the room matched, except that one chair and the wash-stand were black walnut. Mrs. Presbey's room was similarly furnished. Her room alone was in faultless taste—each piece of furniture, even the Davenport, was of Circassian walnut, a wood which had come into general use for furniture purposes only within the last half decade. And the carpet and wallpaper harmonized perfectly with the furniture.

She ran downstairs and burst upon Mrs. Presbey, paring peaches to be preserved.

"Mrs. Presbey," she demanded, "did Dick pay for the furniture in my room?"

"I promised not to tell you," Mrs. Presbey said, defensively.

Betty held up the bank book for the landlady to see. Gone was the reticence as to Dicky's affairs and fine courtesy to keep even herself from penetrating into them too intimately.

"He has beggared himself for me," she cried, excitedly. "Oh, Mrs. Presbey, he has beggared himself for me! Between us we have seventy-five dollars in the world. And he has got to go away, for months—what shall I do? What in all the world will I do?"

She threw herself into a chair and looked at Mrs. Presbey with terror-stricken, preternaturally bright eyes.

Mrs. Presbey dropped her hands, with a half-pared peach in one and a paring knife in the other, into the bowl of peaches in her lap.

"I've expected this right along," she said. "I tried to take up a second mortgage on the house, in order to have the ready cash for you. But I couldn't get any one to take a second mortgage. All I have is a couple of hundred—you're welcome to that—if it's enough."

Betty jumped up, and, following a sudden impulse, threw her arms around the old lady's neck and kissed her.

"God bless you," she said. "I wouldn't touch your money. I—I have some wealthy friends. Some one will help me out."

She went downtown immediately afterwards to Mr. Reynolds' office. She had not heard from Louise for over six weeks, but she was certain that Mr. Reynolds, whose paternal kindness had touched her so deeply, would lend her what money she needed. She was told by his secretary, an impertinent, stand-offish, important young man that Mr. and Mrs. Reynolds were both abroad.

"Will you please give me his address?" Betty said, couching a request in form of a question, as is the habit in New York. She was amazed to hear the important young man reply vigorously:

"Certainly not."

"Why not?" she asked, innocently.

"I'm not permitted to give his address to every Tom, Dick or Harry who happens to ask for it."

Betty flushed painfully, as she said, indignantly:

"I am not every Tom, Dick and Harry. I'm an intimate friend of his daughter, Miss Louise."

"Then, why don't you ask her for her parents' address?" parried the young man, showing huge satisfaction in his own adroitness.

Betty choked back her anger.

"Is she still out West?"

The important young man laughed. "Really," he said, "I fancy that you, an intimate friend of Miss Louise's, are surely in a much better position to guess at her present whereabouts than I, who am merely an employee of her father's."

Still Betty persisted.

"Won't you at least tell me," she begged, "whether Mr. Reynolds is at Karlsbad or Bad Nauheim?"

"At neither place," replied the young man, contemptuously, and, turning on his heel, he walked away. Ashamed, humiliated, with a dull, impotent anger burning in her heart, Betty followed him. "If you knew how urgent this business is," she said, "you would not refuse Mr. Reynolds' address."

"Urgent for yourself," said the young man, disdainfully, "I have no doubt it is. But I am here to take care of business which is urgent for Mr. Reynolds, and no one else." And walking into the private office, he slammed the door in Betty's face.

It was, perhaps, the most humiliating experience through which Betty had ever gone. She could barely keep from crying, as she walked through the long store, and out into the street. How bitterly she regretted not having accepted the check for two hundred and fifty dollars which Mr. Reynolds had offered her!

Mr. Reynolds' store was located on Vesey street, and Betty walked eastward until she reached Broadway. Finding a public telephone booth in a drug store, she called up Penascapet to ascertain whether or not Louise Reynolds was there. Louise was not there, and no one knew where she was.

Next Betty went to Madame Hudrazzini's hotel apartment. The famous soprano had not communicated with Betty on her return from Boston, and Betty entertained a fleeting hope that she might still be in New York, but she was informed by a dapper, polite young clerk at the hotel that Madame Hudrazzini had left for Europe a day after her return from the Bay State. He looked at Betty, questioningly.

"Would you mind telling me your name?" he asked.

Betty gave it.

"I have a letter for you from Madame Hudrazzini." He opened a drawer—hurriedly searched through a package of letters, found the one he was looking for and handed it to Betty.

"Madame forgot to put down your street address," he said. "She gave it to me to post five minutes before leaving the hotel. I kept it, pending her return in the autumn."

Betty thanked him, tore open the envelope and glanced over the letter. It was a brief note, telling Betty that owing to her brief stay in New York, she was unable to look up her dearest, most cherished and beloved young friend. She closed by enjoining Betty to "make up" with Richard.

It was three o'clock by this time, and the sun's torrid heat had the effect of a burning glass. The asphalt on Fifth avenue was a thick, mushy paste, and Betty's head felt as if it were clamped in a steel vise. She remembered that she had tasted neither food nor drink since seven o'clock that morning, but the mere notion of eating nauseated her. Hailing a stage, she got into it to escape from the intolerable heat beating upon the pavements without, although Telfer's was but three blocks below. Telfer's was her last hope.

At any other time, Betty would have endured agonies of apprehension at the thought of meeting Miss Sharpe again. To-day, steeped in utter misery and soul wretchedness, she gave neither Miss Sharpe nor Miss Connors a thought. She had hardly entered the store, however, when the gallery goddesses as well as the other clerks gathered about her with every sign of friendly welcome.

A few minutes elapsed before she was able to disentangle herself from the impromptu reception given her. Making her escape at last, she went to Mr. Hoffman and

briefly told him the financial difficulty in which she was placed.

"I'm awfully sorry, Miss Garside," said Hoffman, "the old man's orders were to take Richard off the payroll after two weeks. He is cruising on Markheim's private yacht up Norway or Sweden way, and there is no possibility of reaching him. They haven't a wireless on board."

"When does he get back?"

"Not before October. No address was given before then. He's under the doctor's orders to cut out all business until then, and he is doing it with a vengeance."

"But why was Richard dropped from the payroll?" Betty asked. "Mr. Telfer always seemed uncommonly fond of Richard, and he has kept others, clerks with whom he never came in contact personally, and who had been in his employ only a few weeks when they fell ill, on the payroll for two or three months."

The cashier lowered his eyes and did not reply.

"Mr. Hoffman," Betty said, speaking with dignified insistence, "can't you take the responsibility of advancing me a few hundred dollars? I'll give you my note."

"Can't do it."

"I am sure, if Mr. Telfer knew the circumstances, he would not refuse to help Richard."

"I don't think so myself," said the cashier, dubiously. Betty thought he was weakening.

"Can't you give me an advance—a loan?"

"I cannot, Miss Garside. Really, I cannot. It wouldn't be honest, you know."

"But you yourself think Mr. Telfer would be satisfied to have you do it," Betty implored.

"Well, I don't know for sure. You see, the truth is, Mr. Telfer was a little down on Richard lately."

"Why? What happened?"

"Oh, no business matter," Hoffman flashed a quick glance at Betty. "I might as well be frank. When he found out why you quit, he was as mad as a hatter. Pryce was fool enough to tell him. Why, he all but fired Pryce, he was so mad. You see—Mr. Telfer thinks a good deal of you in every way."

Betty was quick to see her advantage and to use it.

"Then, if Mr. Telfer thinks a lot of me," she said, eagerly, "surely, knowing my entire heart is set on saving Dick's life, for that is what it amounts to—he wouldn't refuse."

Hoffman braced himself visibly against this unanswerable feminine logic.

"I wish to heaven I could let you have the money myself, Miss Garside," he said. "But I have been a d. f. and gambled in stocks, and my bank account is wiped out. It stands at zero. I wish I could help you."

Betty stood, hands clasped across her bosom, staring at Hoffman's busy-looking desk with unseeing eyes. A sound, a cross between an ejaculation and a smacking of the lips, made her look up.

"Look here," Hoffman spoke, excitedly, "perhaps you can get a satisfactory answer from Archie."

"Archie? Is Archie in town?"

"He is coming in to-day. He will be here in a few minutes. He wants to get some documents I am keeping in the safe for him. He has actually had to marry one of the three—have you heard?"

"I have read no papers recently," Betty answered, evasively.

"Well, the one he married, it appears, has a little fortune of her own. Trust Archie to know what side his bread is buttered on."

"But has Archie the right any more than you to let me have the money?"

Hoffman laughed.

"After all, he is the boss's son—and if he gives me an order in writing, so that he cannot crawl out of the transaction afterwards, who am I to refuse his orders? You see, Mr. Telfer always allows Archie the privilege of drawing on him for about five thousand a year. That's a state secret, of course, so mum is the word. Frequently he runs up to seven thousand. He's only got six thousand so far this year, so, if Mr. Telfer doesn't approve, he'll make me debit Archie's account with the amount he gives you. See? Oh, they have fine scenes in the little office in the rear, father and son have. But *they* always close both doors."

Betty said nothing. Innate tact suggested to her the bad taste of discussing derogatively a man of whom she was about to ask a favor.

She had an uneasy feeling that it was not just the thing to ask Archie to help her. And yet, to whom was she to turn? And if Hoffman was willing to take Archie's signature for a loan to be made to herself, it was, after all, Hoffman's business and not hers. The money belonged to Telfer, senior, even if Telfer, junior, gave an order for it.

She had not waited ten minutes, when Archie swung into the room, looking handsomer and more modish and more splendidly groomed than ever. He nodded condescendingly in Hoffman's direction and went right to his father's rooms.

"He didn't see you," Hoffman said to Betty. "Will you go right after him and tackle him, or do you want me to talk for you?"

"Thanks," said Betty, rising. "Perhaps I had better 'tackle him' myself."

As she was about to enter the room, Archie appeared in the doorway.

"What an unexpected pleasure!" He performed an elaborate handshake simultaneously with an elaborate lifting of the hat, which he held conspicuously aloft during the ceremonious handshake. "Won't you come in? I trust I am not presuming unduly when I ask whether or not you came to see *me,* Miss Absolute Zero?"

They both laughed, remembering that Archie had once said Betty would make excellent company on a sizzling summer's day.

"I assure you I feel like anything rather than absolute zero to-day," Betty said, still smiling. Archie Telfer's airy nonsense always acted upon her nerves like a soothing lotion.

"What? You amaze me! Is the Great Ice Period about to be terminated by this ungodly heat with which we are visited? Joking aside, what is the matter? You do not look quite yourself."

"I'm not quite myself, Mr. Telfer. I'm in serious trouble."

The smile of well-bred good-fellowship was wiped away from Archie's mobile features. A look of grave and sincere concern succeeded.

"Oh, I am sorry, indeed! Won't you come in? Perhaps I can serve you."

He held the door open for her in his best Chesterfieldian manner, and, after entering himself, drew up a chair for her with that graceful haste which a certain type of stage-gentleman invariably employs in doing a woman a service. He waited until she was seated, and then sat down himself. His entire manner was charming, ingratiating. Betty had never liked him better than at this moment; she remembered the reputation he had and the unkind things Dick had said of him and the impolite epithets he had bestowed upon him. It seemed odd that for

Richard's sake, she was about to place herself under deep and lasting obligations to this man.

"Now, what can I do for you?" Archie asked, with a manner which, had it been sincere, would have been absolutely charming. "Command me—won't you?"

"Dick has been awfully sick. Typhoid."

Archie's countenance expressed alarm and concern.

"And, to cut a long story short," she continued, "my bank account and Richard's as well have declined to approximately nothing. Your father, Mr. Telfer, had Richard dropped from the payroll after two weeks."

"What a shame of my father to do that!"

Betty's color came and went with the fleetness of a cloud tossed across the heavens by a stormy wind.

"I do not know where to turn. I have got to get Richard out of the city, if he is to live, and I have no money. Mr. Hoffman says he will let me have three or four hundred dollars, if you say so."

"That's very nice of Mr. Hoffman—that's downright good of Mr. Hoffman, thoughtful fellow! But how can I? I've never meddled with my father's business affairs. He might resent my doing so, now. And, frankly, I'm not in position at the present moment to antagonize him."

"I see," Betty's tone was illustrative of her decline of hope.

"However, I will be glad to help you out personally."

Betty flushed to the roots of her hair.

"I cannot expect you to do that, Mr. Telfer, and I don't see how I can accept a loan from you."

"Nonsense, you are merely a proxy. It is Richard to whom I am lending—how much did you say?"

"Would three hundred be too much?"

"Three hundred? That won't carry you very far. Let us say six hundred."

Archie produced a pocket check-book and a fountain-

pen and began writing industriously. While he wrote, he talked. His gestures reminded Betty of a scene in "The Sun-God," in which Archie's part called for his writing a letter on the stage. Archie Telfer's grace of manner and elusive charm were as extreme off the stage as on.

"Richard is a fine fellow—takes himself a bit seriously, art is a goddess to him, not a profession—always disliked me a little—I'm afraid he disapproves of me for not spelling 'drammer' with a capital D."

The check was written out, the signature affixed. Archie blotted it, tore it from the stub. He handed it to Betty, then suddenly drew it back.

"By the way," he said, "I have no right to give you a check. Just fancy, a man with my reputation! I owe it to a charming girl like yourself to protect her name. No, decidedly, I must not give you a check. That monkey of a valet of mine—confound the fellow—always looks through my checks when they come back from the bank, and he's a sieve, a perfect sieve. Let me see—what's to be done!"

He tore up the check and dropped its infinitesimal remains into the waste-paper basket. Then he took out his wallet and counted the bills contained in it.

"A miserable fifty," he said, "is all I have with me. Miss Garside, I am compelled to ask you to do something which I dislike extremely to ask. I have some business downtown, but will be at my hotel at six o'clock. At eight I have to make the Sag Harbor train. Will you come up to my hotel, and wait for me in the lobby? We'll find some unobserved corner in which I can hand you the money. They will cash my check for me in the office of the hotel."

"Can't Mr. Hoffman cash it for you?" Betty inquired.

"I doubt it—at this hour—however, I will see." It did not occur to Betty that Archie was doing a singular

thing in going out to see Hoffman, instead of ringing for a boy and telling him to ask Mr. Hoffman to step in to see him. Nor did it occur to her that Archie might merely walk out of the room in which they were sitting, and, in a few minutes, walk back again without having seen Hoffman. Nor did it occur to her that the simplest way of letting her have the money would be for Archie to give Hoffman a check made payable to cash, with instructions that he was to pay the money to Betty the next morning, as soon as the banks were open.

When Archie came back into the room, he said, in a tone which commiserated the import of his words:

"Hoffman cannot cash it. I'm awfully sorry that I have to put you out to the extent of coming up to my hotel."

His manner, more than the commonplace words, conveyed unfathomable depths of feeling. Betty's heart warmed to him more and more.

"You're not going to embarrass me by apologizing to me in addition to doing me this very great kindness, Mr. Telfer?"

He replied with a platitude, a platitude which, to a girl of small experience in the ways of men, seemed a further indication of true friendship. Every caution against Archie dinned uninterruptedly into her ears by Richard was relegated to oblivion. If anything, she was a little ashamed that the man whom Richard had never referred to except in terms of contempt and opprobrium was showing her such unexampled and delicate kindness.

They were standing opposite each other, preparatory to her leave-taking. Impetuously she stretched out her hand to him with a gesture half-shy, half-intimate.

"Mr. Telfer," she said, "you cannot know how much your kindness means to me. I—I had been elsewhere before I came here—and I was almost in despair. I

thank you more than I can say." She hesitated a moment, and then continued, bravely: "It is good to know that one has such a friend. I hope some time, in some way, to be able to show my gratitude." And again the color ebbed and flowed on her cheek like clouds on a wind-blown April day.

He took the hand she offered him so charmingly. He shook off his grandiose, impressive manner and became nobly straightforward—exquisitely simple. He did not relinquish her hand immediately, but for a moment placed his left hand over it gently, caressingly. He immediately released it, however, before she had time to become confused or embarrassed and continued, reassuringly:

"I want you to feel always that I am your friend."

It was half-past four when Betty left Telfer's shop. She had barely time to go home and be at Archie's hotel by six o'clock, so she walked across to Union Square and sat on a bench near the red geraniums. A song of thanksgiving filled her heart. It was so poignantly sweet that she forgot her fatigue and her hunger. Even the heat had dwindled into a negligible fact before the divine certainty that she was to have the wherewithal for taking Dick away.

Punctually at six she was in the lobby, and Archie, twirling a stick, came walking through a few moments later. He bowed quietly when he saw her—the most inconspicuous bow he had ever given her, and pretended to great surprise. In view of his remarks of the afternoon to her, she gathered that he pretended to be surprised at seeing her so that no one should guess they were meeting by appointment. The conviction which had been born in her that afternoon, that his reputation was much worse than himself, was fortified and strengthened by this new courtesy. Surely no man could have

been more thoughtful, more gentlemanly—not even her Dick.

"Let's find a sequestered nook," he said, in an undertone, and Betty followed whither he led. But they came upon no "sequestered nooks." Every room they entered, every corridor they turned into, was occupied. Archie's brows contracted in displeasure. He said "too bad," "exasperating," "very unpleasant," and walked on and on, carefully avoiding one or two tiny parlors reserved for guests of the hotel, of which, on application, he might have obtained solitary occupation.

"I'm afraid I will have to ask you to come up to my rooms? Do you mind? I have a suite, you know—a parlor attached. I cannot possibly hand you a roll of bills here."

For one moment Betty's heart misgave her. But a year of business life had bevelled off some of the cast-iron rules with which every gently nurtured girl enters life. She knew that there are times when a woman who is fighting her own battle in the world is frequently placed in a singular position, a position the reverse of conventional. And that, she assured herself, was all there was to the situation in which she was now placed. Archie Telfer was put upon a little pinnacle in her esteem. Archie Telfer was a much maligned man. Archie Telfer was a gentleman. And Archie Telfer was a friend.

She nodded in acquiescence of his suggestion. In the elevator, a sudden spasm of fear lighted a blaze in her soul, and she wished herself safely out of the hotel. She quieted herself with the reflection that "no man would dare . . ."

They walked through a dimly lit, Holland shrouded corridor, over inch-thick carpets, like balsam to tired feet. Archie's rooms opened out on a courtyard in which a

fountain gurgled gently among palms and rubber-trees. He placed a chair for her at the open window, then, as some one passed the door, went and closed it. In a business-like way he pulled the roll of bills from his pocket, counted them out to Betty upon a small table that stood between them, and pushed them toward her. Betty gathered up the money, and placed it in her reticule.

"Don't you want me to sign a note, or a receipt, or something?" she asked.

"Nonsense," said Archie Telfer, in his biggest, most masculine way. "Nonsense."

Betty rose.

"The only thing I can think of saying seems trite and commonplace," she said. "But I'm grateful, intensely grateful. I only wish there was some way of showing my gratitude. I wish that very earnestly."

Archie Telfer walked around the small table and stood beside her. He put out both his hands. Shifting the reticule over her wrist, she placed her hands in his, as he invited her to do, with a little, timid gesture meant to express her thankfulness. He clasped her hands firmly, warmly, and she noted, with a little start, how hot and dry were his palms, for she had removed her gloves to count the money, and when she looked up at his face she saw that in his eyes was a smouldering, glimmering light. She became terribly frightened in an instant—she wanted to say something, anything to break the oppressive silence that suddenly filled the room and beat between them like the fluttering wings of a bird, and seemed to link her and Archie together as with a tangible chain. She stammered, confusedly:

"You don't know what I've been through to-day."

Suddenly her tears began to flow. Lack of food, fatigue, the nervous strain she had been subjected to all day, the frightful heat, broke down her self-control.

Her tears flowed thick and fast. She wanted to reach for her handkerchief to staunch them, but Archie had not yet released her hands. He held them in his burning palms, and though she tried to disengage them, she did not succeed. She told herself that she had been clumsy, had not made him understand that she wanted to free her hands, and she tried again, with no better success.

"I want to get my handkerchief," she sobbed.

"Poor little girl, poor little girl."

Archie's voice was alluringly caressing. Suddenly she felt her hands released and his voice said, breathlessly, very near her face: "I will dry your tears for you," and then, with incredible swiftness, before she realized what was happening, he had folded her in his arms and was raining kisses upon her eyes and cheek.

"Let me go, let me go!" she cried.

She struggled, but her struggles were no more effectual than the struggles of a rabbit caught in a steel trap. She found herself enveloped as in steel sheeting. Twisting, twirling, she tried to escape from him, and to escape from his voracious mouth, she threw her face forward and backward, but he contrived to hold even her head in his embrace, so that he might kiss her uninterruptedly. He did not kiss her roughly. Memory harked back to the cruel kisses Dick had showered upon her on one or two occasions, kisses that hurt because they were so rough. Archie Telfer kissed her slowly, gently, softly, not roughly, not brutally.

"Your poor little thing," he whispered, "let me kiss away your tears, though you are shedding them for another man. Betty, Betty, I love you, I adore you. I did not mean to tell you—but I could not help myself, my little darling."

She had stopped struggling at last, and he thought that his kisses, the pressure of arms and hands upon her

limp body were subjugating her. In reality, she was merely husbanding her strength to take advantage of an unguarded moment in which to break away from his hold.

Assured of victory, as he thought, he kissed her more ardently. She contrived to loosen her right arm from his grip, and, with clenched fist, she struck blindly, furiously at his face. The impact and suddenness of the blow, which had happened to land upon the beautiful Greek nose of which the papers made so much, sent him staggering away from her with a cry of pain.

With rare self-possession, Betty glanced toward the table for a possible article of defense. She caught up a match-receiver of heavy, chased silver, freshly filled with matches. It made a formidable projectile and the thought flashed into Betty's brain that it might be made to do splendid protective service in another respect.

Clutching the match-receiver in one hand, she tugged furiously at the clasp of her reticule. It flew open. Pulling out the roll of bills which Archie had handed her, she flung it at his feet.

"There is your money," she said, quietly, "now please let me go."

"You're not going to refuse the loan because—because my love got the better of my discretion?" He was standing between her and the door, and now made one step in her direction.

"Don't you dare come near me!" Menacingly, she held up the heavy receiver. "I wish to leave your rooms, Mr. Telfer. Kindly step aside so I can get to the door."

"Betty—Miss Garside, listen to me. I was mad, quite mad about you. I've been in love with you ever since I met you the first time. I knew I had no chance with you, because you loved Pryce, but that did not kill my infatuation. If it hadn't been for Pryce, I would have

offered to marry you. Upon my word, I would have offered you marriage."

"Very kind of you, I'm sure."

"Offered you marriage? Is that what I said? I would have begged you to marry me. Betty, I've been engineered into a marriage, but, happily, Reno is still on the map. Will you marry me after I get a divorce?"

"Your question is a new insult. Please get out of my way. I want to leave this room."

"Listen to me only for a minute," he implored, "take the money, at least, won't you?"

"Sell myself for money? Not even for Dick's sake, Mr. Telfer."

"No, no, heaven is my witness," the handsome face was set to a pattern which was a model of contrition—"that, that was not in my mind. Haven't I just told you the reason why I never even told you that I was in love with you? I promised you a loan of that money without any return—that never entered my head for a moment. But —you yourself spoke of gratitude this afternoon, and just now, again, I thought it was an intimation that you had guessed my sentiments for you, and that out of sheer kindness, pity, compassion for my suffering, out of gratitude for relieving your mental anguish, you had determined to ameliorate my suffering in return."

Betty was so shocked that she could only gasp out, "Mr. Telfer!"

"If I misunderstood you or attached too subtle a meaning to your words, I can only beg of you to forgive my indiscretion, and to take the money—I cannot bear to think of your worrying yourself sick about a paltry sum of money while I have more than I need. Please, please, dear Miss Betty, take the money, and forget the unpleasant scene of which I unhappily was the author."

He took another step in Betty's direction.

"Will you accept the money?" he asked, ingratiatingly.

"If you come near me," Betty said, "I will set the curtains on fire. I have the matches in my hand, and I can easily do it before you reach me. I think you will then open the door quickly enough." Terror and deadly fear gave her the resolution she ordinarily lacked.

Archie stood stock-still. His face was a study. Outraged innocence, kindly motives misunderstood played over his handsome face in quick, seemingly pained succession.

"How you misunderstood me," he said, in the tone which, as Richard the Third, he employed in reading the line, "I thank my God for my humility."

"I certainly do *not* misunderstand you now," said Betty. "I did—entirely—when I entered this room. I was filled with gratitude beyond power of words to express. And you grossly insulted me."

"But Betty, Miss Garside, do me the justice to at least believe my explanation. If you had meant to make a certain sacrifice for me, as I believed, if you had intended that I was to thus interpret the wish you expressed for 'some way' of expressing your gratitude, I suppose it would have behooved me to act the part of a demi-god and nobly reject your offer. But I am not one of the stage-heroes I am forced to portray. I am flesh and blood. I am human and I am insanely in love with you."

"Since you will not step aside," Betty replied, "I am going to walk around you to the door. I warn you, if you make one move to intercept me, I shall set fire to this room." She pulled out her handkerchief and placed it in the left hand. With her right hand she extracted a match from the receiver and lit it, and slowly began her march to the door.

Archie picked up the roll of bills.

"I am coming," he said, "to put this roll of bills in your reticule."

He stepped forward, and Betty promptly brought the lighted match into close juxtaposition with her thin handkerchief. Archie stopped and laughed.

"You're game," he said, "you certainly are game. Don't be so obstinate. Don't cut off your nose to spite your face. It was stupid of me to misunderstand, but it was not an irreparable or unforgivable blunder. I have known good and true women, out of gratitude to men whom they could repay in no other way, offer that which I thought you offered me. I didn't, of course, expect you to offer it in bald words—I merely offered to make the sacrifice as easy for you as possible."

"You—Oh, you are vile!" said Betty.

"No, Betty, I am not. If you had made a gift of yourself to me, this day would have been a divine and priceless recollection; in my eyes, Betty, you are but little lower than an angel, and if the angel had shown human compassion for me she would have been an angel still—an angel even more than before."

Richard the Third, wooing Anne over the dead body of her husband's father, husband and father both murdered by himself, did not work harder or more plausibly at his task of blinding virtue than did Archie Telfer. But Betty was not to be gulled again.

She did not reply to his last speech. She struck a new match—the fourth one, and continued her roundabout journey to the door. Archie shrugged his shoulders, walked rapidly away in an opposite direction, to the window, and, hands in trouser pockets, surveyed her superciliously.

"Perhaps you will deign to stop that childish by-play now."

Betty had reached the door. She turned the knob, placed her foot back of the door to keep it from closing again. Then she deposited the silver match-receiver on a chair that was near enough to reach easily.

"Will you listen to me for just a moment?" he begged. "After leaving here, you may regret refusing to take the money which I offer you freely and unconditionally. If so, come here to-morrow evening—at the same time. I will be in my room—the door will be open to admit you. And if you need more money, say a thousand dollars, they are yours."

A little pale, and a little haggard, Archie Telfer was handsomer than ever. The breeze from the open window, playing about his thin Panama cloth suit, revealed to advantage the faultless lines of his figure. But he had lost control of his facial expression.

Betty stared at him for a moment in silence. Then, aghast at his audacity in offering her a larger sum, her contempt overflowed her lips, oddly enough in the same terms of revilement which Dick invariably applied to Archie.

"You cur!" she said. "You hound!"

And she had been simple enough to believe that men "did not dare." She shivered with horror as she realized what a merciful escape she had had. Then she became contemplative. She speculated as to what there was to fear for a man of Archie Telfer's type should he succeed in overpowering a girl after luring her to his rooms. The abyss of impotence which was irretrievably the girl's portion in an affair of such a sort, was ghastly. The chances were that the girl would never speak of the degradation she had suffered, and if she did—who would believe her wholly innocent?

Then the thought shivered through her that Dick—her Dick, might in some such way have overpowered the

girl whom she knew only by name. But her heart rebelled against the accusation preferred by her brain. In whatever manner Dick had contrived to compass his own disgrace, she felt sure it had not been in such a fashion.

As in a dream, she walked through the dim halls over the inch-thick carpet, into the elevator and out into the street. As in a dream, seeing all things through a murky, unclean mist, she hailed a street-car. Mechanically, the stupor still enfolding her, she left the car and made her way home. She fumbled for her latch-key, found it, but lacked the sense of direction necessary for inserting it in the keyhole. Mrs. Presbey, hearing her at the door, came and opened it.

"I've been worried to death about you—why, what has happened? Didn't you succeed? Are you ill?"

Betty opened her mouth, essayed to speak, and with a heartbroken smile on her lips, crumpled up in a swooning, forlorn little heap at Mrs. Presbey's feet.

## CHAPTER XXIV

Mercifully, physical distress, pain or fatigue, kills mental pain. Betty slept soundly through the night, after taking a glass of warm milk with sherry and an egg beaten into it, which Mrs. Presbey made her drink in bed. She awoke at five the next morning with the sensation that an unfulfilled task awaited her. Oddly enough, along with the sensation came a recollection not of the previous day's experience, but of the five mutilated bills belonging to Earlcote which were still in her possession.

Curiously, she had not given these a thought for weeks past. Now, the recollection of possessing them came as a vivid experience. Would Earlcote, if she returned him the mutilated bills, be willing to let her have a small loan? It was possible that he would, since he had told her that he regretted having made her the offer, as her voice would never amount to anything after all. She blushed a deep red under the bedclothes, as she remembered the taunt she had flung at him in reply. Would he hold that against her? She had not much faith in the success of her plan, but she told herself that she must spare no effort, however wild it appeared, to obtain money.

She steeled herself and went to Richard's room. He was still asleep, and she knelt at his bed and prayed fervently for courage and fortitude.

"Betty!"

Her head, brushing against his hand, had awakened him.

"Betty, you're not crying?"

"No, Dick—praying."

"Were you praying for me?"

"A little for myself. Dearest, how are you to-day?"

"Fine, Betty, fine as silk, as Hoffman would say. But I am a little weak still. Betty, it was worth being so sick to find out how dearly you loved me."

"Did you doubt my love?"

"A little, dear, just a little."

"Promise me you will never doubt it again, Dick, not under any circumstances. I never doubted yours, though you gave me reason to—once."

"Don't," he said, looking deeply pained. "Please don't do that."

She kissed his cheek and laid her own face against his.

"Dicky," she said, "you're to get up to-day and every day this week—every day you are to sit up a little longer than the day before. Doctor's orders. And a week from to-day you and I are going to the country for a month or so."

"A week from to-day I'll be going back to business."

"No, Dicky, you won't."

"Look here, Betty, don't excite me. I tell you I can't go to the country. No cash."

Betty had expected this, and had prepared herself to weave any required elaborate tissue of lies in order to gain her point. She, so truthful and scrupulously honest, was prepared to lie to an unlimited extent to put a quietus upon the financial apprehensions of the man she loved.

"Dicky, dear, you mustn't worry about details just now. There are a few checks you will have to sign in a day or two. And then, dear, Hoffman held back our salary for the last month, knowing you were too ill to endorse checks. And it seems Mr. Telfer has author-

ized him to advance us—you, I mean—any required sum."

"That's awfully decent of Telfer," said Dick. "I didn't expect it. I'll have to write and thank him."

"He is not in town now, Dicky, and we may be back in New York before he returns. So you'll let me take you away, won't you?"

"Will they hold your job for you?" Dick asked, anxiously.

"I don't know, dear. I only know that you need my care just now and that I am going with you."

"It's not to be thought of," he said, excitedly. "I cannot let you throw up a good job for my sake."

"Dick, love makes all things possible—makes it possible to sacrifice and to make sacrifices as well. It is true I will have to sacrifice my position. But you, dear, will have to sacrifice your money, you will have to pay my board as well as your own."

"Naturally," said Richard, "naturally, but that's no sacrifice. That is mere fairness. That's, oh, hang it, my head is ringing like a buzzer."

"You need your breakfast. I'll get it." She rose from her knees, brought him a towel and a wash-basin, and placed them on the chair beside him.

"Can you wash yourself? Or shall I help you?"

"Thanks, no—I'm not as weak as all that."

"After you have had your breakfast, dearest, I have got to go down and see my 'boss.' He sent a note by messenger, asking me to come down for a few days."

"Oh, very well," said Dick surlily, "everybody is forever whisking you away from me."

"Wait till we get to the country," Betty responded, laughing. "You'll see more of me than you want to."

It was a very sombre-eyed, white-faced girl who, a few hours later, rang up Earlcote Manor on the long

distance telephone. What in all the world was she to do if her plan with Earlcote miscarried? Where was she to turn for money? While she waited, receiver in hand, she was filled with a sudden panic of misgiving as she remembered how unwarrantably rude she had been to Earlcote, and more than that, the thought troubled her that Earlcote, on hearing why she wanted the money, for of course she could not keep it from him, would refuse it because he would be glad to hear of the death of the man whom he feared as a future rival.

"Here's your number."

"Hello—— Is this Earlcote Manor? Can I speak to Mr. Earlcote? Miss Garside, please."

Her blood hammered so clamorously against her temples that she could scarcely hear the voice at the other end of the wire, but before Earlcote hailed her, her excitement had abated sufficiently to insure control of both voice and hearing.

"Miss Betty?"

"Yes, Mr. Earlcote."

"What gives me the pleasure of hearing that incomparable voice of yours, even over the telephone?"

"Then you still think it incomparable?"

"Yes, Miss Yankee, I certainly do."

"Mr. Earlcote, when and where can I see you?"

"What's that? Am I to understand you wish to call on me?"

"If you will allow me to."

"Heavens and earth, I will prepare the fat of the land for your entertainment. But, pray, allay my curiosity, or you will find only poor clay to greet you when you arrive. What has happened?"

"Mr. Earlcote, I'm in trouble, serious trouble." Betty's voice wavered and broke off falteringly.

"Can I serve you in any way?"

"You can, if you will."

"Well, you must come and tell me all about it. When are you coming?"

"I haven't looked at a time-table. Is there a train somewhere around eleven?"

"Oh, you must not travel by train on a sweltering day like this. I'll not hear of it. That adorable, angelic, peerless voice of yours to be choked with dust, irritated by particles of coal, tortured by the heat of a parlor car? Nonsense. My car will be at the foot of Queensborough Bridge, New York side, at eleven o'clock. The chauffeur is a Hindu. You cannot miss it."

"Very well," said Betty meekly. "Thank you."

She hung up the receiver, and sat for a moment, chin resting upon the instrument. What would Earlcote say, and do, on finding out the nature of her errand? Was it foolhardy, after her experience with Archie Telfer, to go alone to Earlcote Manor? The last question she dismissed summarily as unworthy of a moment's consideration. What physical violence had she to fear from Earlcote—broken, crippled, so weak that he could hardly stand without help? What indeed? Moreover, she felt that even if Earlcote had been sound and strong, he would fight with other weapons than mere brute force—weapons that would call for every grain of astuteness and shrewdness in her own make-up.

But what if he were to bring up the same old question of making a bargain with her, a bargain involving her voice, since he had told her over the telephone that he still considered that incomparable? She grew sick with fear. Dick's life was at stake—she had tried every other resource and failed to obtain the necessary money. Therefore, if Earlcote insisted, nothing would remain

but to agree to his condition. But the thought of having to spend three or four hours a day in close proximity with him for years to come, as his pupil, made her giddy and sick.

She hoped against hope that this cross would not be laid upon her.

## CHAPTER XXV.

Even in the winding labyrinth of leafy glades of evergreen, cultivated rhodendron shrubs, hardy azaleas as tall as a man, thriving privet growths, and rose pergolas through which Dushka led Betty, the heat and humidity of the sultry day were noticeable. They went down a shelving, barren, rocky incline covered with sweet fern and bracken and water plants that throve on a thin trickle of water oozing between the rocks, then up again through crowding pillars and domes of box and walls of red rambler roses. The path then became undulating, and each serpentine twist revealed a different shade of evergreen trees, ranging from palest sea-green to deepest olive. The path terminated abruptly and, spread out before them, lay the huge aviary, built in imitation of the Taj Mahal. The white light of a summer noon beating upon it, made it appear white as the foam of the sea, and its dazzling splendor was reflected by a long, narrow pool of water, overgrown at one end with pink pond lilies. Flamingoes, herons and kingfishers were laving themselves in the water, and near the pink pond lilies several black swans arched their graceful necks as they swam majestically to and fro. Box, weeping willows, cypress trees and cedars, growing in orderly confusion along the narrow footpath on both sides of the pool, gave a mournful dignity to the landscape. The four towers of the Taj Mahal, altered in this counterfeit presentment to serve as dove-cotes, were surrounded by a legion of fluttering birds, whose white plumage rivalled the snowy whiteness of their homes.

Betty gave a little cry of astonishment. The startling loveliness of the scene pierced through the sheath her anxiety had woven about her sensibilities. Her guide beckoned to her to follow. Into the heart of a tiny pine forest they plunged, and a few yards further on, walking upon a fragrant carpet of pine needles that had been centuries in the weaving, they came upon a pavilion of white marble so exquisite and fairylike in design that its architraves and pillars seemed like the edge of some filmy lace handkerchief transmuted by magic into stone. The pavilion was a copy of the tomb of Muzar Khan Baluchi Kurmath, at Tatta, but this, of course, Betty did not know.

In this pavilion, in a wicker chair, dressed in white flannels with a white cashmere shawl about his shoulders and white silk gloves upon his hands, sat Earlcote. At his feet, upon the steps of the pavilion, crouched the two Hindu page boys, their nude bodies shining like century old cedar wood, and, as they moved, though ever so slightly, the apron of beads and coins which was their sole garment made strange sweet music that blended softly with the soughing of the south wind in the pines. In their hands they held enormously long-handled fans, made of peacock feathers. Betty had the sensation as on her first visit to Earlcote, of stepping into a scene from the Arabian Nights.

"I will not offer to shake hands with you," said Earlcote's sharp, metallic voice. "Sit down opposite me. That is the coolest corner. And if you still feel warm after having been here a few moments, Abdullah and Mahomet will fan you."

"It is deliciously cool here," said Betty.

"You will find it more comfortable here than in the house," said Earlcote. "I will have lunch served here. You will join me?"

"Thank you," said Betty. "I am not hungry."

Her invincible repugnance for the man was rampant in her once more, and she could not quell it. The thought of having to exchange social platitudes with him over a slowly served luncheon was intolerable. How then, if his society was so insufferably obnoxious to her for the brief period of a luncheon, would she be able to tie herself down to the bondage of studying with him for years to come; she quailed at the mere thought of such a possibility.

Earlcote regarded her shrewdly. Betty thought his eyes showed a diabolic delight in her fear of him.

"You are not hungry," he said, his voice clanging ominously. "But I am. Once more I ask, will you join me at luncheon?"

Betty grew very pale. She did not make the mistake of underestimating the man she hated because of her hatred. She realized that she could not afford to antagonize him by being candidly unamiable as in the past. She chafed horribly under that thought, chafed still more also, because she knew that he thoroughly understood the situation, and would correctly construe a suave answer. She hated herself for not daring to be brusque with him. But she did not dare.

"Thank you," she said thickly. "I shall be glad to lunch with you."

"You mean," Earlcote said icily, "that you submit to the inevitable. The service you wish me to render you must be great indeed."

He kept his wicked eyes fixed on her even after he finished speaking, nor did he once remove his glance from her face while his lips moved silently as he gave his instructions to Dushka and Hahdjan. A feeling of terror raced over Betty. She was in the ogre's stronghold indeed!

Luncheon was served with lightning-like rapidity. Earlcote made no attempt at conducting a conversation while Dushka and Hahdjan set the table, and placed the viands upon it. He continued to stare at Betty, and went on staring until the girl's hands were cold as ice and her heart beating with fear and repugnance like the heart of a snared bird.

She forced herself to eat some of the food to which Earlcote insisted on helping her. He ate little himself, but urged her to eat, and, as she dared not refuse, she made a valiant effort to consume at least some of the food on her plate. Finally the table was cleared and the servants dismissed, all except the two Hindu boys, who stretched their brown, shining bodies at full length upon the marble steps and went to sleep.

"Now," he said, looking at Betty with narrowing eyes, "now, what can I do for you?"

"Mr. Earlcote," said Betty, the tension she had been under during the past half hour raising her voice to such a pitch that it was almost a cry, "I have come to you in my despair, and I am throwing myself upon your mercy. Richard has been very ill, and unless I can take him away to the mountains, there is no hope that he will live."

Betty had half expected Earlcote to ask sharply, "And what concern is that of mine?" She had braced herself for that, and was prepared to beg Earlcote eloquently to give her his help. Instead, a complete change in Earlcote's manner took place. The malevolent smile with which he had regarded her left his face. When he spoke it was with a gentleness such as she had never seen him manifest before. So guileless was she in spite of her manifold experiences of the last months, that no suspicion of double dealing or insincerity occurred to her.

"I am sorry," he said. "Tell me all about it."

"I have told you all that counts."

"What ailed him?"

"Typhoid-pneumonia."

"And now you want to take him to the mountains. How am I to serve you?"

"I hardly dare tell you what I came to ask of you."

"You will have to. How otherwise am I to know what you wish me to do?"

Betty took the five mutilated one thousand dollar bills from her purse and laid them on the table one by one. Speaking earnestly, she said:

"Mr. Earlcote, you have the other pieces—the pieces which, if added to these, make these bits of paper worth five thousand dollars."

Earlcote had lowered his eyes.

"What follows?" he asked.

"Five thousand dollars is a large sum of money," Betty said. "To me it seems a small fortune, and rich as you are, that sum must be of some consequence to you."

"Of so little consequence, Miss Betty, that I confess I had entirely forgotten the five mutilated bills."

Betty felt herself cruelly checkmated. Did Earlcote wish to indicate to her gracefully that her voice no longer seemed the desirable toy he had once thought it? Her desperate frame of mind gave her the courage and faith we attain only under supreme pressure. She believed that she must have power to move Earlcote to compassion.

"You remember them now, don't you?" she asked after a pause.

Earlcote smiled wanly.

"Now that I see them I can hardly help but remember."

"Mr. Earlcote, I want to return these mutilated bills to you—so that, by piecing them together, you regain five thousand dollars. And I ask, beg this of you. Will you loan me one tenth of the sum thus restored to you for the period say of one year? Every cent will be repaid you."

"Do I understand that you make the return of the half-bills dependent upon this loan?"

Earlcote's voice cut like a razor. It jarred every nerve in Betty's body, but she held herself in hand and replied with as much humility as she could muster:

"Certainly not. The half-bills are rightfully yours. As you will remember, I wished to return them to you long ago. I am returning them now, irrespective of whether or not you will loan me the five hundred for which I am asking you."

For the first time during that strange interview Earlcote dropped his eyes. His face wore an inscrutable smile. He replied, his metallic voice as nearly expressionless as such a vehicle of discord could be:

"But, of course, you hope that I will loan you the money. You are very, very anxious for it—aren't you?"

Betty's heart gave a great jump of joy. Earlcote's attitude seemed propitious. With the optimism of youth, which develops every desirable possibility into a probability, and that into a certainty, with no other grounds for so doing than its own desire, she believed that she had all but attained her end, and that it needed merely a bit of impassioned pleading on her part, to melt Earlcote into acquiescence.

"Anxious is hardly the word," she said. "Richard is everything to me, as you know. His life is dearer to me than my own. If you will help me, Mr. Earlcote, I will be everlastingly grateful to you."

"You have no one else to turn to, I suppose," he said, not unkindly, as Betty thought.

"Every other friend to whom I might apply is out of town." There was a pause. Earlcote still sat with lowered eyes, and suddenly, by some subtle means of apprehension, some mysterious undercurrent of thought transference, perhaps, Betty felt that the pause was ominous. A cold breath of wind seemed to pass over her heart. She felt chilled to the marrow. And at last Earlcote lifted his eyes to her face and squarely met her gaze.

"Miss Garside," he said coldly, "the five thousand dollars are yours on one condition."

"I had hoped you would loan me the comparatively small sum I ask for without any condition except that of repayment."

"Five thousand, or five hundred, or fifty thousand—it makes little difference to me," Earlcote said calmly, "so I get what I want in return."

"And that is——"

"Your voice, and——"

"And——?" A hideous fear clutched at Betty's heart. Would he dare renew the preposterous proposition which he had made her first of all, the day he had handed her the bills?

"I desire to marry you."

The glory of the day was obliterated for Betty. For a moment she seemed to have gone blind. Then everything flashed back vividly into acute distinctness—the marble pavilion, the torrid heat without, the hideous creature who sat opposite her, smiling malignantly, and who had just calmly told her that he wished to marry her.

"Why do you wish to marry me?" she stammered;

then, as he laughed, her cheeks crimsoned. "You do not love me," she said.

"You are right," he said brutally. "I do not love you. I do not love you in the least."

Betty drew back. She experienced the sensation of having a snail crawl over her bare skin—of having that loathsome snail inform her that she—not himself, was the undesirable party.

"Then why?" she asked, speaking in a thick voice.

Earlcote leaned forward. His green cat's eyes stabbed like rapiers. "I do not feel called upon to give my reasons," he said. "I desire to make you my wife. That is all that concerns you. You may take my offer, or leave it, as you choose."

Betty sat in horrified silence, staring at Earlcote as he had before stared at her. Before the undreamed-of ghastly reality all her previous fears of what he might exact shrank into a Lilliputian limbo of oblivion. She told herself that this thing could not actually be; that he was merely amusing himself a little at her expense.

"You cannot possibly mean that," she said.

"I most emphatically do mean it," he replied.

"But last autumn you offered me five thousand for—for my voice alone. Now I only ask you for five hundred. You cannot expect to make the bargain as hard for me as all that?"

"One expects to make a bargain as advantageous for oneself as possible."

"But what you suggest is unfair, frightfully unfair to me. Oh! It's impossible!"

"If it is impossible, well and good—go elsewhere for the money."

"I have told you I have no one else to turn to!"

"Exactly, it was very foolish of you to give me that information. You see, you gave yourself away."

Betty said, in pained amazement:

"But you asked me, and I answered."

"Exactly. I repeat, it was very, very simple of you to answer that question of mine. I really did not expect that you would answer it. It was like taking pennies from a child. You realize, don't you, that you threw your cards down on the table for me to see?"

"Do you mean that if you hadn't known I had no one else to go to you might have been satisfied with my voice alone?"

"Precisely." Stone crashing on stone, iron clanging upon iron, could not have been more harsh than that one word, as pronounced by Earlcote.

Betty became indignant.

"You cannot be as cruel as all that! It's fiendish!" she cried.

Earlcote laughed. A gargoyle laughing! Betty clenched her hands. Before that laugh of derision, caution, prudence, self-repression went to the wall.

"I hate you," she gasped. "I hate you! I hate you! Marry you! I would let myself be trampled to death by wild horses or be burned at the stake before I would marry you!"

"Unfortunately, being burned at the stake or being trampled to death by wild horses will not bring you the money you need. Also, allow me to point out to you how inconsistent you are!" Earlcote's voice had assumed its gentle, silvery tone—it was no longer akin to iron but to well-attuned chimes floating over a snow-bound Christmas landscape. "You malign me in one breath and in the next try to flatter me, in the most childish way, into relinquishing my obvious advantage. You tell me I am a fiend——"

"No, no, I didn't say that!" Reason was returning to Betty now that her blind fury had spent itself.

"Not to-day, perhaps—but my memory is long, although I had forgotten the trifling sum of five thousand dollars which I had tied up on a gamble upon your voice."

Betty's anger was running through her veins in a quick torrent of flame. This iteration on Earlcote's part of the negligible esteem in which he held the sum of which a paltry one-tenth stood to her as the equivalent of Richard's life was little short of diabolical. She did not trust herself to speak.

"You not merely called me a fiend," Earlcote continued, "which, being a token of impotent rage on your part I might have construed as a compliment, but you told me that you despised me—that I am bad and evil, that I am utterly contemptible; you took no pains to hide the fact how repulsive I am to you physically. And now you come here softly and pleasantly and expect me to act the part of an amiable humanitarian who expects nothing in return for a good deed but the consciousness of good performed. You are, as I have said, very inconsistent. If I am bad and evil, as you say, and I do not quarrel with you for calling me that, then surely I am strictly within my right in acting selfishly and evilly now."

Betty became intensely white.

"I should not have said unkind things to you," she said. "I regret having done so."

"Of course you regret having done so now because you realize they are a stumbling block in the way of your getting from me the trifling sum of five hundred dollars."

"Mr. Earlcote," Betty begged, swallowing both pride and repugnance, "I apologize to you for anything I have said in the past, and I implore you, if you have a

"HOW BADLY YOU NEED THOSE TWO HUNDRED DOLLARS" SAID EARLCOTE. p. 39]

grain of mercy in your composition, not to play with me as you are doing."

"I am not playing with you. I have told you the condition on which you can have the five hundred or the five thousand. The conditions are the same for either sum, and they are irrevocable."

Betty gave a heart-broken sob.

"Loan me two hundred for two months," she said. Her brain was thinking with unwonted rapidity. Within two months Mr. Reynolds would be back in New York, or she would have heard from Madame Hudrazzini, and from one or the other she would be able to obtain what money she needed. "It is all I ask. I will even promise to become your pupil. Surely—for two hundred dollars you cannot ask more than that?"

"How very badly you need those two hundred dollars," said Earlcote. "And because you need them so badly, I do ask more. I adhere to my condition."

Betty grew hot and cold in quick succession. She was beginning to comprehend the indomitable, inflexible mercilessness of this man. Yet, though she comprehended, she did not realize it. She possessed in preeminent degree the peculiar form of idealism which, all evidence to the contrary, believes in the innate goodness of all of God's creatures. Her hatred for Earlcote she had always held to reflect upon herself, rather than on him. Surely it needed merely adroit pleading on her part to quicken into active sympathy the latent good in him. But she was at a loss as to the words and method to choose in softening him, and the physical repugnance of him made it difficult for her to plead felicitously.

"I do not even understand why you still wish to teach me to sing," Betty said. "The last time we met you told me that, after all, you did not consider my voice worth your while."

"It is and it isn't," snapped Earlcote. "I have explained fully to you its desirability and its undesirability. It is a perfect musical instrument, but there is no soul back of it because of your emotional deficiency. That is why I desire to marry you. I will arouse the element which you lack, and it will become fused with your voice, making you, after I have trained your voice, the greatest dramatic soprano of the twentieth century. Now you have the situation in a nut-shell. Now, too, you will understand that I cannot be moved one jot or tittle from the stand I have taken."

Betty looked at Earlcote in fascinated distress. She felt as if a net were closing about her—encasing and enfolding and enmeshing her, and any word spoken by herself might be the ultimate thread to bind fast and close the last aperture of that net. She felt limp and sick and helpless.

"Do you agree?" Earlcote asked, as Betty continued to sit in immovable silence.

"I will never amount to anything if I am forced to marry you," Betty said slowly. "Since it is only for the sake of my voice that you wish to marry me, you must realize that I will be able to do better work if I am allowed to marry the man I love."

"The man you love!" Earlcote spoke with contempt indescribable, his voice grating like steel on an iron file. "What is the use of rehashing all that? Richard Pryce has your romantic love, but he has been unable to awaken the woman in you. I am not such a fool as to suppose that I could ever win your love, but I repeat what I told you a month ago. Your hatred for me has an element which your love for Richard Pryce lacks, it is surcharged with sex. By and by you will begin to comprehend many things and your voice will assume a new quality, and you will sing—heavens and earth, *how* you

will sing! And mine, mine will be the glory of the achievement! Now, do you understand?"

Earlcote stretched forth his gloved hands. His entire being seemed galvanized into a vitality which Betty had never seen in him before.

"My God," he said, "do you dimly comprehend what this golden chance means to me, who have been condemned for five horrible years to musical inactivity? Do you realize what that matchless voice of yours means to me? No, no, I will have you, body and soul, to fashion and mould, to make and to develop as I please! No more endless days of enervating listlessness, but the world of music to reconquer, the great, magnificent, difficult battle to fight all over again, knowing that I, with your voice as my instrument, will win out a second time as I won out before!"

Terror swooped down upon Betty before this torrential outpouring of passion. In Earlcote's eyes burned the fire of invincible purpose which propels all fanatics—for all souls dominated by only one overmastering passion are fanatics of a sort, whether they be delicate dreamers akin to Handel, surreptitiously practicing his scales in a garret in his childhood to evade the persecutions of a commercially-minded father, or to the multifold soul of Islam, burning and pillaging under duress of its bigotry.

Betty recognized the futility of opposing her will against this man's. Beside him she was a pigmy, but something of his ruthless iron spirit seemed to enter into her. She nerved herself for a supreme effort. She knew it was useless to beg, and yet she begged, pleaded, entreated and implored with an impassioned poignancy which until then had been alien to her. Here was a new Betty, indeed. Until now she had allowed commonsense to prevail. Heretofore she would never have at-

tempted the impossible. Now, even as she begged and supplicated, she knew that her endeavors were foredoomed to failure. And yet, knowing that she must fail, with a persistence that held the element of grandeur, she continued to implore his clemency. Her solicitations ended always in the same phrase:

"You cannot be so cruel—for such a small sum—it is like asking my soul in return."

"I do ask it in return—although the phrase is usually used in quite a different sense."

"If it were a larger sum?"

"The larger sum! I have told you you can have as much as you ask. Larger or smaller, the money is nothing to me."

Betty fingered the mutilated bills still lying on the table between them. Earlcote suddenly took a small envelope from his wallet and showed her that it contained the companion half-bills.

He laid the envelope on the table, and then, pulling out his cigarette case, placed a cigarette in his mouth. He struck a match, but instead of applying it to the cigarette, he lighted one of the half-bills which Betty had placed on the table, and with that burning half bill he lighted another, and so on until the fifth had burned to a crisp. With this finally he lighted his cigarette.

"Now," he said, "do you understand of how little value money is to me?"

The sensations which Betty experienced were those of a starving man or woman who sees a rich man deliberately destroy bread.

She said in a low voice which had the effect of softness:

"Murder has been done for lesser provocations. If I could, if I knew how, I think I would murder you now."

"The poison is working," said Earlcote. "You will leave me now in high dudgeon. To-morrow morning you will come back and signify your willingness to take my name and the five thousand. Five, or ten, it will be for you to say which. Stanley Earlcote will not haggle about money with the woman he marries."

Betty rose and pulled on her long gloves.

"After this assuredly I will not marry you," she said. "Even if Richard is to die in consequence. But he will not die."

She expected Earlcote to ask for an interpretation of the last statement. She imagined he would become alarmed; that he would fear that after all she had resources at her command of which she had said nothing. But her poor little desperate move was wasted on the astute Earlcote.

"No," he said, "Richard Pryce will not die. You will save him by doing as I wish."

"I will save him by doing as someone else wishes," said Betty. "I was not quite accurate when I told you that I had no one else to turn to. I have an offer of the necessary funds from—someone else."

"Nevertheless, you will accept my offer—not someone else's."

"I would not be too certain."

"The other offer is even more distasteful to you than mine, I am quite certain."

"Could anything approximate in distastefulness an offer of marriage from you?" Betty asked tauntingly. "I think not."

"I think 'yes.' Otherwise you would not have listened to me for such a length of time. I am not a mind-reader, but I can tell you why the offer is even more distasteful to you—because it involved dishonor. Am I not right in my conclusion?"

Betty buttoned her glove with an assumption of indifferent calm. Earlcote's shrewdness filled her with sudden volcanic rage. Her blood literally seemed to boil; to seethe and foam in a chaotic violence that affected her throat. And again the strange sensation of being older, more experienced, herself yet not herself, took possession of her.

"You are right," she said quietly, without looking at Earlcote, "in that the other offer involves dishonor. However——" Betty looked up and squarely met Earlcote's eye, "however, even dishonor is less disagreeable to me than marriage to you."

She looked Earlcote over with deliberate insolence. She did not understand herself. She knew that her face was expressive with sinister eloquence at the moment, and she gloried that in some way which she herself did not understand she was so thoroughly able to show Earlcote how deep and abysmal was her contempt for him.

Earlcote's eyes narrowed to tiny slits.

"If your voice were trained, with what expression you would sing now! Ah—I am on the right track. I will make a great singer of you yet."

Betty stepped from the pavilion into the path.

"Don't be too sure," she said. "It's a gamble, you know." The feeling of being a mature woman and not a mere girl grew stronger. Why—oh why—had she not felt thus at the beginning of the interview? Why had she been so stupidly, asininely frank with him? "If I were you," she continued, "I wouldn't gamble. I would take the certainty."

"The voice without the woman? No, thank you, I prefer the gamble, because I am confident of the outcome."

Betty gave him a look of indolent contempt.

"Will you call your man to guide me out of this labyrinth?" she asked.

"He is waiting for you at the next lilac bush—and the car is waiting for you a little beyond."

"Thank you. Good-bye." Without vouchsafing him another glance, she walked away.

## CHAPTER XXVI

Betty dismissed Earlcote's automobile at the same place where it had picked her up—the Fifty-ninth Street entrance to the Bridge. She rode across to Fifth Avenue in the trolley; then, filled with intolerable nervousness, she left the trolley and stood irresolutely at the junction of the two great thoroughfares.

In spite of the season, Fifth Avenue was not deserted. Vehicles of every description, automobiles and touring cars, plied busily up and down. She remembered how Dick and she had stood more than once at that very point, trying to count how many autos passed in a minute, and how they had amused themselves by selecting the machine which each would choose to own, if they were rich. She became angry, indignantly angry. Surely in this big town, in this "little old New York," noted for the big-hearted, whole-souled responsiveness of its citizens, to every cry of distress proceeding from no matter what remote corner of the earth, there was more than one man or woman who would help her, if they only knew of her trouble. But how to make her distress known to those charitable souls? She could neither proclaim her trouble from the house-tops nor advertise it in the papers. The latter possibility fascinated her, but after dallying with it she dismissed it as untenable. A year in New York had taught her that an advertisement soliciting financial assistance was bound to bring one sort of offer only.

Rapidly she began walking down the Avenue. She thought of Archie Telfer. She seemed to be adrift upon

a sea of fear and indecision. When, to alarm Earlcote, she had threatened to accept Archie Telfer's dishonorable offer, she had not for one moment intended accepting it. Now, however, it seemed to her that of the two propositions Archie's was preposterous in a minor degree. A' new feeling stirred in her. While thought of marriage to Earlcote made her sick and giddy with fear and repugnance, she realized that if Archie, instead of Earlcote, had insisted on marriage, she would have regarded the sacrifice required of her in a very different way. She would have deplored the loss of Richard as her life-companion, but she would have looked with comparative equanimity upon the necessity of becoming Archie's wife.

She was woman enough to realize that to marry one man while she loved another must mean supreme anguish. But there was in that anguish a certain nobility, a certain austere joy of self-immolation. It was like sinking in quicksand, earth and sky gradually receding from the sight of the victim. To perish like that held an element of grandeur. But there was no grandeur in the thought of yielding herself to a man whom she detested as cordially as she detested Earlcote. To marry such a man as Earlcote was not to sink in quicksand—it was to sink in a quagmire, a morass.

In her perturbation she almost raced down the Avenue. She was forced to stop for a minute at a crossing, and she realized that she was within a block of Archie Telfer's hotel. Why not go there? Why not end the terrible mental struggle that was rending her? What was an hour of shame and humiliation and dishonor compared to a lifetime of ignoble bondage to Earlcote? She told herself that she was mad, quite mad to hesitate. It would, of course, ultimately be necessary to tell Richard of her dishonor, but Richard, who had erred himself,

would certainly not withhold his forgiveness, particularly as her sin was to be the means of saving his life. Would she not sin more deeply against Richard in marrying Earlcote than in selling herself to Archie. She ran down the street like one demented. She whispered to herself that on no account must she think. Reproaches and self-condemnation would inevitably follow in the trail of her sin, but no matter how black and heinous the pangs of remorse—they, anything and everything, were preferable to marriage to Earlcote.

She walked into the lobby of Archie Telfer's hotel, and asked the clerk to telephone her name to his room.

Utterly miserable and wretched, she sat down in a huge leather arm chair and waited. Her heart beat frantically. Disjointed events and episodes came back to her. She remembered her mother's eloquent warning against that breach of morality which she was about to commit. The circumstances, the details of that episode stood out against the horizon of her memory with vivid distinctness. But she hardened herself against that warning coming to her from beyond the grave. She acquitted herself with the plea that the circumstances of her case were not merely exceptional but unique.

Her thoughts were brought to a violent standstill, as a train is arrested by a collision, by the appearance of Archie Telfer. Suave and smiling gravely, his hat in his hand, his every gesture—the very posture of his figure, denoting submission and respect, he approached her.

"I am glad to see you," he said.

The words, inoffensive in themselves, but tinctured with a subtle meaning, sent the blood away from Betty's heart. Suddenly, in a moment of inexpressible, flash-light vividness a comprehension of the position in which she was about to place herself, came upon her.

She had come there for the express purpose of selling herself to Archie Telfer for the sum of six hundred dollars. She had come here to prostitute herself. She, Betty Garside, had been about to do this thing!

She rose and said abruptly:

"I came here thinking I could give you what you desire in return for the money which was to save Richard's life. I find I am mistaken. I am not willing to make the exchange."

Turning, she walked quickly away and out of the hotel.

She had acted from no moral conviction, no fear of consequences, no acquiescence in her mother's warning. She had been impelled not to dishonor herself merely by the blind, unreasoning impulse which, for the average woman of gentle birth and breeding, makes the giving of herself to a man whose name she does not bear, not so much a thing wicked and evil as low and inexpressibly vulgar.

Outside of the hotel a feeling of supreme inertia, of leaden fatigue came over her. She reflected dimly that now there remained no means of saving Richard's life save by marrying Earlcote. She was amazed at her exceeding placidity with which she now regarded the inevitable.

She was conscious no longer of aversion or hatred. Only two facts remained clear-limned. She loved Richard, and she was tired, desperately tired. It came to her that on the morrow she would be a rich woman. No need now to save pennies for Richard's sake. Her fatigue became intensified to the point of physical and nervous exhaustion.

She stepped into the street and accosted a policeman, asking him to hail a taxicab for her. As she stepped into it she experienced merely a sensation of physical relief;

no fear of the next day; no fear of the ultimate fate awaiting her.

Arriving at home, she ran directly to Dick's room.

"Dearest, did you have a very long day without me?"

As she knelt by his bedside, and felt his thin arm about her, every thought and emotion save that of love for him vanished. She remembered suddenly that she must fabricate a plausible story to account for the money she was to receive the next day. She smiled, she kissed his cheek, she stroked his hand, and then, though he protested vigorously, she kissed it.

"I wouldn't stay away from my Dicky a minute if I didn't just have to," she said. "And I've got to be away again to-morrow, too."

"All day?" Leaning on his elbow, he regarded her wistfully.

"All morning—I hope to be back earlier than to-day. Why are you in bed, Dicky? Are you feeling worse?"

"I was tired, very tired," he said, speaking querulously like a child, "that's because you were away from me."

"After to-morrow, darling, I will not be away from you one single minute all day. It is all arranged. Hoffman is to give me a substantial sum in bulk as an advance on your salary account. If agreeable to you, he will make the check payable to me, so as to save you all bother. Later, when you are well enough to attend to financial details, I can transfer the bank account to you. Is that satisfactory?"

"Certainly," said Dicky, "and if I continue to be this lazy I shall be glad not to have to look after the money end at all. Betty, dear, you little white saint—isn't all this too much for your fragile shoulders?"

"No, dear."

"Where are you taking me to, Betty?"

"I think, dear—we will have to settle ultimately to-day

where we are going—that the place in the Adirondacks is more suitable. Satisfied?"

"Yes, Betty. But will my bank account stand it?"

"The board *is* a little high. However, I am getting the money in bulk. He is loaning me—Oh, what's the use of bothering you with details? I have it all figured out, dear, and we will pull through very nicely."

"Very well, dearest."

His utter indifference, the fatigue he manifested even after a short unexciting talk, made her realize keenly how necessary it was to get him away. Her heart contracted with a sudden horrid fear as she looked at his white face and emaciated arms. What if he were to die after all?"

"Betty," he said suddenly with closed eyes, "have you forgiven me entirely?"

"Yes, Dicky."

"If I had behaved myself I would not be quite as ill as I am. I mean, I might have taken typhoid, but I would have rallied much more quickly. Do you realize that?"

"Fully, dearest."

"You are paying more heavily for my sin than I. You paid in giving up your position at Telfer's to take one not nearly as agreeable, and you are paying now in giving up your present position. I am ashamed of myself, Betty, bitterly, horribly ashamed. It seems it is always the woman who pays—even the perfectly innocent woman has got to pay in some way or another when her lover or husband goes wrong. Betty, tell me again that you forgive me."

Betty gathered Dick in her arms and laid her cheek against his. Without speaking she held him thus for a few minutes like a sick child. She was paying, indeed, for his wrong, more heavily than he suspected and now

a great wave of thankfulness swept over her for having escaped Archie Telfer. Ultimately, on telling Richard of that, she would have excoriated him. If he had dragged her into dishonor through his own wrong-doing, he would never, in all the world, have forgiven himself. Remorse and self-reproaches could have corroded his mind, poisoned his heart and vitiated his entire life. To tell him of her marriage to Earlcote would, in truth, be horrible enough. Her marriage to Earlcote—well, she was not married yet, and she still hoped, with the supreme optimism of youth, that some miracle would save her from the necessity of contracting such an alliance.

Still holding Richard in her arms, she said, speaking with sudden passionate intensity:

"Dick, darling, I have learned much these last weeks. I know now, darling, that love must make a man and woman one in spirit; that their unity must be so complete if one falls, the other falls too; that if the man errs, his fault is due quite as much to some shortcoming on the woman's part as to his own viciousness. I do not quite comprehend this as yet, but I feel that it must be so. Neither of us, since we love each other truly and wholly, can commit an isolated act. All our acts bind and tie us together. They are chains of iron or velvet thongs, but velvet or iron, they hold firmly and closely and indissolubly. You and I are one, Dicky; for any fault of either, for the sin of one, the error in judgment of the other, both must pay. Otherwise love would not be love, and we twain would not be one."

## CHAPTER XXVII

The words which sprang so spontaneously to Betty's lips amazed her quite as much as they amazed Richard. She had every reason to be filled with despair and with fear. Yet the words which came unbidden from the subconscious depths of her heart lulled and soothed her. She slept soundly through the night, and when, the next morning, she finally sat opposite Earlcote in the marble pavilion, she felt a courage and resolution very different from the shrinking horror of the day before. She had a purpose to fulfill, and she would fulfill it. She was about to promise herself in marriage to a man she loathed, to tie herself to him in bodily and spiritual bondage, and yet she felt that in some subtle way an ineffable something, the quintessence of her soul and therefore of herself she would reserve for Richard. Her spirituality had never been more intense than at the moment. And her brain was clear, clear as a bell. She would not blunder to-day. Richard's life and well-being and happiness were at stake.

"Well," she said, speaking in a casual voice, without giving Earlcote a chance to sneer at her, "I have come back as you prophesied."

"You are ready to marry me?"

"That was your condition. I also have a condition to make.

"Name it."

"I am to have the right to dispose of the sum of ten thousand dollars exactly as I wish."

"That, of course, is understood. You realize, naturally, that I am going to insist upon an immediate marriage."

Betty's self-possession wavered, swayed to and fro like a pendulum and righted itself.

"You mean—to-day?"

"I do."

"But who is to take care of Richard? It is absolutely necessary that I go away with him. Won't you give me three months' time?"

"You shall have three months or a year's time if you wish. Immediately after the ceremony, to-day, you are at liberty to go and rejoin your Richard."

"Very well," Betty said quietly. "I agree. As to the disposition of the ten thousand dollars——" She paused, looking keenly at Earlcote. He said impatiently:

"I have already agreed to your condition."

"You have. It remains for me to explain what I wish done with the money."

"It is not necessary for you to tell me."

"Pardon me, it is."

"Eh?" Earlcote was startled out of himself by the surprise communicated to him by the statement.

"I asked for the larger sum for this reason. The bulk of it is to go into a scholarship for Richard to cover a period of three or four years."

"A scholarship?" Earlcote rasped, emphasizing the word by shooting out his hideous hands toward Betty. He wore no gloves to-day and Betty recoiled. Earlcote said viciously, as she shrank from him:

"You will have to get accustomed to them now."

"Yes," Betty assented feebly. "Meanwhile, let us revert to the scholarship. You will have to let it come to Richard in such a way that he does not suspect whence the money emanated."

"Nothing of the sort," Earlcote snarled. "What sort of an easy mark do you take me for?"

"I can retort by putting the same question to you," Betty responded coolly. "If the condition does not suit you—my other offer still is open for your acceptance—five hundred and my voice."

Earlcote brought his hand down upon the small round table furiously.

"You wanted to save Richard Pryce's life," he screamed. "I am furnishing the money for that. You don't suppose I will help him in his career?"

"So I was right about your jealousy of him? And you are *not* willing to have me dispose of the money as I pleased?"

"I am perfectly willing that *you* should do so."

"No, you are not. You were foolish enough to offer me a much larger sum of money than I asked for out of mere braggadocio." She mimicked Earlcote's manner of the day before, succeeding admirably. "It was very, very simple of you to throw your cards upon the table so recklessly, Mr. Earlcote."

He fumed with rage, and she continued:

"This is where I have the whip-hand, and you will do as I say or I will call the deal off."

"I have no means at my command to make it appear as if Richard Pryce were receiving a scholarship," Earlcote said at length.

"You will have to find means. You are connected in various ways with half a dozen musical organizations. You can create a scholarship in one of them for his especial benefit. But I am not going to make the tremendous sacrifice you exact of me merely for Richard Pryce's life. What would life mean to him without myself and without a career. His art and myself are his two great loves. If one or the other is eliminated from his

life he will still be able to go on. But deprive him of both, and life would mean for him a void, a burden, a nothing. I would be doing him a poor service, indeed, to save his life and rob it of everything that makes it worth while."

Earlcote lowered his eyes. Usually he stared those with whom he was talking out of countenance. Betty, remembering that his craftiness of the day before was accompanied by the same gesture, was on her guard.

"The money is yours," Earlcote said. "Why this nonsense about a fraudulent scholarship? Why not hand the money to him yourself?"

Betty replied with spirit:

"You know as well as I do why not. Richard would not be the man he is; he would not be the man I love if he would accept money for any purpose whatsoever from the girl he loves procured at such a price. You know this. You count on this in your calculations. But I am not quite as foolish and simple as you think. Either you agree to arrange matters so that Richard Pryce believes the scholarship abroad comes to him through some institution, or our deal is off. And one word more, Mr. Earlcote. You yourself must not figure in the transaction. You must take excellent care to arrange things so that Richard will not suspect anything of the truth. If he does, if he refuses the scholarship in consequence, I—although I will then be your wife legally, will not be your pupil. This is final and ultimate."

Earlcote looked at her in surprise. She had spoken with the aplomb and assurance of a woman of the world.

"The woman in you is fast developing," he observed.

"It is," Betty said, coldly. "It is only now, when I am being forced to give up Richard Pryce as my life-com-

panion that I am beginning to realize how dear he is to me. That being so, I am going to give him every chance of happiness in his art."

"You will have to decide," Betty went on, "whether you prefer having my voice to train and looking forward to Richard as a great pianist, or not having my voice to train with the chances dead against Richard. For if you refuse, Mr. Earlcote, I am going to take my chance on pulling Richard through right here in the city. He may not pull through, and then, again, he may. The best physicians make mistakes."

Earlcote looked up quickly.

"I will do as you say," he said. "Do you wish a contract, in writing?"

"It is not necessary. You live up to your part of the agreement and I will live up to mine."

Earlcote said, gravely: "I trust you implicitly, Miss Betty—I know that you will live up to your part."

A little later Earlcote counted out ten thousand dollars in crisp, new five-hundred-dollar bills to Betty, and after that the minister, whom Earlcote had summoned, married them. The expeditious, business-like dispatch with which the momentous event was carried through turned Betty's knees to jelly. While she listened to the marriage service her heart seemed to gyrate throughout her entire body. She gave the promise "to love, honor and obey," with the liveliest emotions of hypocrisy and shame. There fell an awkward pause. The moment had come for the bridegroom to kiss the bride. Betty turned agonized eyes upon Earlcote. He remained immovable and silent, and the minister, after a momentary pause, continued, concluding the ceremony.

After he was gone, Earlcote said:

"When am I to expect you?"

"Three or four months hence, as soon as Richard is

perfectly well, but not before the matter of the scholarship has been arranged."

"There is nothing you wish to say to me before you go?"

Betty hesitated for a moment.

"I thank you," she said, nervously, "for the generosity you showed in not kissing me—in allowing me to return to Richard with lips unsoiled by the touch of another's."

## CHAPTER XXVIII

With the blandness of youth, Betty had failed to realize what a strain she had entailed upon herself. She looked forward to the day when she must surrender herself to Earlcote as the apex of her sacrifice, but she was to perceive, in the weeks that followed the ceremony of her marriage, that though the zenith of her suffering lay in the dim, distant land of the future, there was an appreciable quantity of suffering for her along the road she was traveling to reach that future.

First of all, there was the immediate anxiety for Richard himself. For many weeks after they reached Mount Eerie, his life seemed to hang in the balance. The slightest change in temperature, the tiniest digression from the diet prescribed for him, affected him adversely. Betty had once expressed the wish to be able to serve and wait on Richard, to do for him constantly. The wish now was abundantly gratified. She heated his milk for him, prepared the malted milk, took the temperature for his bath, laid out his fresh linen—she even turned on the steam in his room in the morning before he got up to dress.

"To all intents you two might be married," said one of the boarders, a woman of about forty.

"To all intents, except one," Betty responded, gravely. "I hope you do not think ill of me for being a trifle unconventional."

An elderly woman, with a sweet face framed by white hair, who was knitting a pink and white afghan, dropped her work and said:

"No, my dear, we do not. There is not a person in the house but loves and respects you for the self-sacrificing devotion with which you are nursing Richard Pryce."

Betty clasped her arms across her bosom and broke into the swift eloquence with which she was gifted only when deeply moved.

"There is no self-sacrifice attached to it," she said. "If it were not selfish, wicked, even, I could wish for nothing better than to have him dependent upon me always. I am happiest when I am doing something for him. I wish I had the right to go to the kitchen and cook his soup. Oh, you will laugh at me, of course, but there are mornings when I resent having running water in the house. I would like to have to go to the well, on a cold winter morning, and draw bucket after bucket of water and carry the buckets up three flights of stairs, one by one, and then heat them for his bath—not to prove that I love him, but just for the sake of doing for him."

"Oh, my dear," interposed the woman of forty, "that task would be far too easy. There is a pond a half mile away from the house. Why not go there on a morning when mercury is fifty below, and chop a hole into the ice for the water. The hole would be caked over by the time you got back to it for the second bucket, and you could have the pleasure of chopping a new hole into the ice for every new bucket."

"I suppose you do think me awfully silly," said Betty.

"I, for one, think you are a darling, even if you are a sentimental little goose," said a bride of three months. "Catch me slaving for my husband, if he were to fall sick, the way you are doing for your sweetheart. Believe me. Nothing doing."

But the sweet old lady, with the halo of white hair, protested.

"Miss Betty's spirit is the right spirit. It is far too much on the wane. The love that suffers all things and endures all things, that courts hardships and glories in overcoming impediments, is the true love. My dear, I would like to kiss you."

Betty received the kiss of the old lady in silence, and the good-natured laughter of the others was brought to an end by the arrival of the house-wagon, lumbering up the road with the mail-bag in full view. They all scurried off for the morning's mail. Among the letters handed to Betty was one addressed to Richard, in a hand she did not know, and she carried it to his room, wondering from whom it might be.

"Dicky, are you asleep?" she whispered at the door.

He opened it, by way of reply, and invited her to enter. Both Betty and he had asked to have cots substituted for beds in their rooms, as owing to his precarious condition it was unavoidable that they enter each other's rooms during the day.

"From whom is it?" Betty asked.

"Haven't the remotest idea."

He opened it, furrowed his brow, and then gave a joyful exclamation of surprise.

"Betty!"

"What is it, Dick? May I glance over your shoulder?"

"Betty, darling sweetheart, it is from the secretary of the Musical Progress League." He began reading aloud, skipping words here and there, but giving the gist of the letter, "having reconsidered our decision, believing the verdict by a certain judge to have been not wholly unbiased—four years—Europe—allowance of two thousand a year——! Betty . . ."

Betty's face indicated almost as much surprise as his. She had expected to hear from Earlcote prior to his taking action, and the particular way in which he had

taken action, without as much as notifying her, amazed her intensely. This especial way of doing the thing was the very last solution of the problem she would have expected.

The letter made her realize keenly that the pact between herself and Earlcote was in full force, and she experienced a sensation of nausea. Some day, no matter how remote that day now seemed—unless death mercifully snatched her away, she must surrender herself to Earlcote. She was innocent, but she was not as ignorant as she had once been, and more than once her imagination had dwelt upon possibilities, in her future relations with Earlcote, too hideous to be contemplated with any sensation but that of acute horror.

"Betty, you do not seem a bit happy."

"I am very happy for you, Dick."

"That sounds as if you and I had different interests. Two thousand a year! Oh, Betty, I'll be a great artist some day, after all. I'll—" he spoke so fast that he stumbled over his words and his sentences became telescoped into intelligibility. While he spoke he ran up and down the room, rumpling his fingers through his hair. It was the first time since his illness that he had done this particular thing. He was intensely agitated with joy. "Betty, Betty—why do you seem so indifferent, so sad, almost? You have been so sweet with me all along."

He came and placed his hands on her shoulders, as if to swing her about. She resisted gently. She realized that her face was an index of her feelings, and that she must put it in order before he caught sight of it. The thought came to her to let him see her face; to arouse his suspicion by continuing silent and sad. Then—if he suspected—if he arrived at the truth, she would, thanks to the one clause of her agreement, be able to crawl out

of her pact with Earlcote. But her sense of justice and probity told her how dishonest such a course would be. Moreover, Richard was not yet quite well; she dared not excite him, and because of this, and because Earlcote was playing fair, she felt that on no account would she be more base than he.

When she faced Richard at last, she had her face under control.

"I am happier for you, Dick, than I can say."

"You have a queer way of showing it," he grumbled, somewhat disgruntled.

"I am a little selfish, dearest. I would love to have you to myself always. This splendid good fortune will take you from my side."

"Nothing of the sort! Two thousand a year is a small fortune. We'll get married as soon as we get back to New York. Of course, dear, for the present, for years to come, marriage must mean that you take my name only. You trust me as to that, don't you? You know that you are sacred to me, don't you, Betty?"

"Yes, dear, I know."

"Then say you will marry me. Darling, it will be good, so good, to know that, after all, my talent will secure you ease and comfort."

The element of grim humor in the situation did not escape Betty! But the grimness was decidedly more apparent than the humor. She said, evasively:

"Don't let us plan for the future, dear. Let's enjoy the present. We were so happy, weren't we, dear?"

"Happy? I should say I am happy!" The exquisite egotism of the man nature in combination with the artist soul made possible perfect indifference to the low spirits of the girl he loved and who loved him so devotedly. Betty saw it with a pang. For the first time a doubt came to her as to the measure of his love for her.

Similarly situated, would he have made a sacrifice approximating in cruelty the one she had made for him?

"Betty, Betty, I am so happy. Where is my music? That tinpanny piano downstairs is a little out of tune. But I will perish unless I give expression to my happiness. As Schumann said to his Clara, 'I should like to sing myself to death, like a nightingale.'"

"I am afraid you will sing yourself to death, indeed, if you go to the piano now," said Betty. His condition of febrile excitement seriously alarmed her. "Your nerves are jumping. Come, let us take a long walk to quiet them."

"Nerves! I'll go insane unless I hear music, good music, at once."

"I'll sing for you. Will that do?"

"Betty, you *are* certainly perfect." He kissed her, then resumed tramping the floor. "Your voice will soothe me. I confess, I am a little jerky now."

"What shall I sing, Dicky?"

The simple offer to sing involved heroism on her part, for—because of her bargain with Earlcote, she fairly loathed her voice these days.

"Sing Schumann's *'Im wunderschoenen Monat Mai.'*"

"Very well, come and sit down in the Morris-chair."

"I cannot sit still. I am too nervous."

Betty insisted. She arranged the chair for him, and persuaded him to sit down by pretending that she was unable to sing unless she felt his hand in hers. Her ruse succeeded. He sat down, leaned back and closed his eyes. She drew the shade down; he protested; she declared the light hurt her eyes; he acquiesced. Then, taking his hand in hers, she began singing. She sang the song he had asked for, and another and another, and finally she felt his fingers relax in hers. He had fallen asleep.

She stopped singing and sat, regarding him. A profound sorrow swept over her. For the first time that day she had thought him egotistical. She now questioned herself as to the sin he had committed. That, too, in a way, had been due to egotism, and it was for that egotism, that old sin of his that she was to suffer a life-term of bondage. Because he had been selfish and weak she had been forced to take upon herself the most ignoble servitude imaginable for a woman of spirit—marriage to a man she loathed. For the first time she questioned her wisdom. Was Richard worthy of the colossal sacrifice she was making for him? Then she wondered whether this attitude on her part marked a new era—an epoch of beginning selfishness in her life. She analyzed herself and her emotions narrowly, realizing keenly, as she did so, that she was no longer the naïve, unsophisticated and charitable girl of a year ago. She now completely forgave him his sin as such. She regretted it not so much on moral grounds as for the concrete consequences in which it involved herself. She herself was doing wrong, for she was lying to him, and the fact that the deception she was practising on Richard was based on unselfishness on her part made it no whit less a deception.

Right or wrong, worth while or not worth while, she loved him. She became intensely aware that, being human, he as well as she had sharply defined limitations. But she loved him. And suddenly it seemed to her that the vista before her was not as hopeless as it had appeared. Somewhere in the distance happiness beckoned. Nothing could ultimately deprive Richard and herself of that. She could not explain the feeling. She did not attempt to dissect it. Intuitively she felt it was good for her and that she must cling to it.

The enormous sadness that invaded her suddenly dis-

solved itself in tears. But she was afraid to give away to the luxury of weeping. She knew that she was so wrought upon that her tears would come not as a summer shower but as a wintry tempest. A tempest of tears would shake her, set to quivering the hand that held his, and that quivering of her hand might wake him. Therefore, she controlled her emotion and choked back her tears.

Richard improved rapidly after that. The first week in October brought the first cold weather, and the brisk, cold air seemed to buoy up Richard to an almost normal condition. Betty realized, with horror, that another five or six weeks would restore him to health. She now tried to retard his complete restoration to health. She did not insist on his taking as many milk punches, nor so much of the calf's-foot jelly as before. She was not as eager to keep him from long, fatiguing walks, or from playing too long. She almost rejoiced when he seemed less well, as happened occasionally. She was in the anomalous condition of wishing him perfectly recovered, but not quite well, for when anything ailed him she was sick with fear of a serious relapse. Her emotions swung to and fro, like a pendulum.

Betty practised daily self-repression in these weeks. Every day brought her a step nearer the hour of her surrender. Her nerves were at constant tension. She thought of Marlow's Faustus, and that last moving, terror-filled speech, "Now, Faustus, thou hast scarce an hour to live, and then thou shalt be damned perpetually." She felt as if she had signed away herself to perpetual damnation. Yet, with the sublime heroism of which only women are capable, and which transcends the greatest gallantry achieved by any soldier, the greatest feat of daring performed by any sailor, she smiled and joked and laughed and forced herself to appear happy.

The weather was perfect. The house at which they were boarding, was deserted by the younger, gayer element by the beginning of November, and house and grounds were so large that Richard and Betty seemed to be in a little paradise all by themselves.

Richard's mood approached exaltation. Never, not during his early courtship, had he shown such ecstasy. The sweet fever of convalescence, which painted all the world rosy for him, conjoined with the promise of a splendid future, aroused in him a rapturous fervor.

One afternoon, having played the twenty-four Preludes of Chopin, with Betty at his side, in tender and poetic language, he invoked a vision of that monastery in Majorca, where the master, on being denied shelter by the inns and hostelries because of his disease, sought refuge with George Sand and the faithful coterie of friends who, adoring in him the master as well as the kindred, though exalted spirit, had followed him to his winter's exile. Situated on a promontory that overlooked the sea; wind-swept, sea-battered, inhabited by hooting owls, cawing crows and haunted by predatory eagles, the deserted, gloomy, crumbling old monastery, which was scarce fit to serve as a human abode, by the very pitifulness of the estate to which it had fallen, stimulated the mind of the master into the various moods perpetuated in the preludes.

Richard likened the preludes to precious gems. Not only is every mood, every emotion, every passion depicted in them, but they possess a strange potency of visualization. They invoke, by some subtle means, pictures at once passionate and poignant, and the infinitesimal shades which they reflect, from the peace inhabiting deep autumnal hues—russets and grays and browns—of the Fifth, to the somber passion of the Twentieth, from the dainty swish of fairy wings and caroling of birds of the Eighth and the majestic sweep of eagle wings in

the Tenth, through countless gradations, allied and yet diversified, similar and yet unlike, they have their equivalents in the unbelievably minute differences in shades which characterize the topaz, aquamarine and sapphire, all of which are blue, and the hiddenite, chrysoberyl, nephrite, jadeite and peridat, all of which are green.

Betty finally interrupted Richard's rhapsody.

"Let us take a walk before twilight," she suggested. They stood at the window, which commanded a view of barberry hedges showing a strawberry pink at a distance, and serving as a background for an enormous bed of pampas grass, the feathery tops of which swayed in the wind, like the plumes of King Henry of Navarre. A grove of spreading beech trees of enormous girth, stood to one side, half of their sulphur-yellow leaves strewn at their feet, the other half suspended against the western sky, like tiny disks of translucent gold-leaf.

Richard did not wish to walk. He waved his hands to indicate the landscape without.

"Next week," he said, "I will have to leave all this. I will be well enough to return to New York."

Betty's heart failed her. He had made similar announcements half a dozen times before, when a return to business was apparently warranted by his health. To-day the announcement was justified. He was the picture of health.

"You're not well enough, Dicky," she began, but he interrupted her vehemently with:

"I am well enough, dearest, and you know I am."

"One week more, Dicky."

"Dearest, it isn't honest. Think, I have to tell Mr. Telfer about this scholarship—and to make arrangements to repay him the amount of money Hoffman advanced you on account of my salary. It is really only fair that I get to New York as quickly as possible in order to

adjust matters. It's a matter of acting honorably, you can see that."

Betty became alarmed. He had been so supremely happy all day that it seemed an impossible task to topple him down from the height of his bliss. She had braced herself for the moment, but now that it had come the blow fell in much the same way as a death which has long been expected. It found Betty in an anticipatory mood and yet unprepared.

She entreated Richard to remain one more week.

"For my sake, Dick. I feel as if my life depended on it. It isn't dishonest—or dishonorable. If I could only convince you."

"You must allow me to judge."

"My feelings are more dependable in this than your judgment."

"Feelings are never dependable."

Still she begged and he gainsaid. She clung to his neck. In her terror of the revelation which she would have to make, she unconsciously resorted to feminine artifices such as she had never employed before. She laid her cheek against his. She kissed him repeatedly—even his mouth; she brushed back his hair with her hand; but his fine sense of duty made him adamantine.

Finally, to end the combat, he said:

"Betty, it's useless. Mr. Telfer returned to town three days ago. I had no chance before then to write and thank him for his more than kindness, and——"

"You haven't written him, now, have you?" Betty demanded, the blood chill in her veins.

"I have."

"Oh, Richard! And mailed the letter?"

"No, dear; it will go with to-night's mail." He misunderstood her gesture of relief.

"You will not have to mail it, Dick."

"Betty, sweetheart," he was a little vexed, almost cross, "don't start all over again."

"Dick, you haven't Mr. Telfer to thank at all."

It was out at last. She had said it not in the least as she had pictured herself beginning her painful task, but at least the beginning was made. She felt, as she looked into his face, mirroring a look of polite surprise, as if flames from a fiery furnace lapped between them. He was calm now. Five minutes hence he would be raving through the room like a madman, and it was reserved for her to say the thing that would bring about the transformation.

"What do you mean?" he inquired.

"Mr. Telfer did not advance the money which we have been spending during your convalesence."

Richard said, in a tone which was disproof personified:

"But you told me he did, Betty."

"I told you an untruth."

"You—! Nonsense. You are saying this to make me hold back the letter."

"No, Dick, I am saying it because inevitably I will have to tell you the truth."

He was still politely incredulous.

"Who else?" he asked.

"Dick, I was in desperate straits. The doctor told me I would have to get you away in order to save your life. I went to every one I could think of to procure a loan. Madame Hudrazzini was abroad—the Reynolds were on the Continent, Direktor Markheim and Mr. Telfer were away on a long cruise. Then . . ."

She broke down under the intense, taut look of his eyes which told her he was beginning to realize that her story of Mr. Telfer's loan had been some sort of merciful fiction.

"And then?" he asked, quietly.

"Then—then—I sold myself."

"You sold yourself! *You sold yourself!* Betty!" He sprang toward her. "It's not true—it cannot be true! I will not believe it! No, *no,* NO!" He clenched his hands, he beat his knuckles together and bit his lips savagely.

"Not in that way, Dick!"

A sensation almost of peace came over her in her gratitude that she had escaped Archie Telfer.

"I knew it was not so, Betty! When a woman speaks of selling herself, she means one thing only."

"Not always, Dick. A woman can sell herself in marriage."

"In God's name," he begged, his face gray with fear, "tell me quickly what you mean."

"I could have sold myself the other way, but I chose to sell myself in marriage, rather than dishonor myself. Say I did right, Dick!"

"That means," he groaned, "that my chance of happiness is destroyed, utterly destroyed, forever." Tears ran down his cheeks. He was completely unstrung.

Wretched as she was, Betty did not fail to note the complexion of his wail. He thought of himself, not of her, whose suffering was positive while his was merely negative. Were all men, even he who, in her eyes, was the best of men, so different from women? But, while she criticized him, she remembered that she must be careful of him. The nervous shock might otherwise bring on serious consequences of some sort.

"You must not blame me, Dick," she said, gently. "I consented to this marriage only after I had exhausted every other plan."

He asked, with sudden fierceness:

"Whom did you consent to marry? Archie Telfer? I thought he had married some one else."

"Not Archie Telfer."

"Who, then?"

"Earlcote."

"What . . . ?" She had known, of course, that he would fume and rage and bluster, but not in her wildest dreams of anticipation had she expected such an outpouring, such an upheaval as followed. A chaotic stream of fury and disgust ran lava-like from his lips. And now, too, he was thinking of her.

"It cannot be. You shall not sacrifice yourself. You shall not marry that fiend."

"Dick—I am married already."

"It can't be, it can't be!" In his face she read his thoughts. She shivered a little as she realized how far her education, guided by Earlcote, had progressed.

"I came away immediately after the ceremony, Dick! He merely wanted to be sure of his legal right."

"Such a marriage is a farce—it can be annulled."

"I do not see how it can be annulled. And even if it could be I would not ask to have it annulled. It wouldn't be fair, you know, would it?"

"Fair? Who thinks of being fair to that cheat, that toad, that blot upon the fair face of the earth?" In his wrath Richard became Shakespearian. The epithets he heaped upon Earlcote would have done credit to the imagination and vocabulary of a Paris fishwife. "I tell you I will kill him before I would allow you to be held to such an unholy bargain."

"But killing Earlcote wouldn't be honest, Dick. You were so full of honesty talk when you thought Mr. Telfer had helped us."

But Dick was at the moment not amenable to reason. He continued to rave distractedly. A little later he begged:

"Let us go away together, and say we are man and

wife. Let us go West—somewhere where no one knows us."

"Is it Richard who suggests this to me?"

"Oh, I know it's base of me, doubly base because of my illness. But come away with me—come away with me—only to escape him, as my sister, if not as my wife."

"No, Dick."

"But, Betty—you cannot—it's unthinkable—let us kill ourselves. Be good to me, be kind to me—I shall go insane . . ."

She hardened herself against his wail.

"Because we have been cheated, Dick, it does not follow that we must turn into cheats ourselves."

"I cannot understand you, Betty. You, to whom the idea of marriage was so distasteful—it cannot be that you have fallen in love with Earlcote?"

"Dick, are you out of your mind? I have pledged my word—what else is there to do?"

She was limp and weak with the fever which had been running through her veins, and she spoke with seeming diffidence. His wrath increased, towered, burned into a frenzy. She became more and more diffident as he became more and more intense. A homicidal mania possessed him. He wanted to kill Earlcote and Betty and himself, and then, again, he declared that he would kill Earlcote only. He vowed it was his duty to do this.

"Any jury would acquit me," he cried, "if all the facts of this infamous deal were to be made known. And then there will be no impediment to our great happiness."

"I promise you I will never marry you if you murder Earlcote."

"Heavens and earth! To lose you, to lose you! Surely, no man was every punished for his sin as cruelly

as I am being punished." He raved on; he threw discretion to the winds.

Pale and trembling, Betty listened in silence to his outbreak. When Richard paused at last to draw breath, she said, coldly:

"Earlcote does not love me."

"What?"

She explained briefly why he had insisted on marriage.

"And because he does not love me, Dick," she said, "I entertain one little ray of hope—the hope that he thinks the terrific strain I have been under all these weeks will bring out what it pleases him to call my 'latent womanhood,' and that he will release me from marriage."

"That's very clever of you," said Dick, "but I do not believe that he harbors any such eleemosynary intentions."

"Dick—he didn't kiss me at the ceremony."

"No?" Dick's brow contracted. "May have been pure devilishness to make you think the very thing you are thinking. Betty—if he insists on marriage to you—I won't kill him, since you say you will not marry me in that event, but I will kill myself. I cannot go on living knowing that you are the wife of another man, and that man Earlcote."

"No, Dicky," she said, quietly, "you will not kill yourself."

"I will, I will." He began tramping the floor, the slim, eloquent fingers at work in his hair. "I will, I will." He said it stubbornly, not excitedly.

Betty met him as he tramped to and fro, and gently arrested his walk by placing her hands on his shoulders.

"No, Dick," she said, "you will not kill yourself, and I will tell you why. You no longer own your own life, dear, and therefore you have no right to throw it away. Your life belongs to me. I have paid a horrible price

for it—the most cruel price any one can pay, and I claim it as my own. Even if the scholarship had not come to you, which, contrary to all expectations, makes your career almost a certainty, I would expect you to go on living. You know as well as I do, Dick, that love of your art, now you have means to pursue it thoroughly, will compensate you in some degree for loss of myself, or, at least, make loss of myself more tolerable."

"No, no," he cried, vigorously, but she realized that in invoking the vision of a dazzling future she had obtained the desired effect. She was focusing his thoughts upon the good, not the ill of the future.

"But you did not know this chance would come to me," he said, suddenly, "and you saved my life, nevertheless. To what end would you have expected me to live? Wasn't it a little—a wee little bit selfish of you, Betty, to save me?"

She spoke hurriedly, in a sort of exaltation.

"I think," she said, "that if I am sturdy enough to accept my future, you would have been robust enough to live yours. The fact that this wonderful opportunity has come to you seems a sort of vindication of my belief that in the end everything will come out right. Your work will make your future easier, and I feel certain, I cannot say why, that something will come into my life to make mine easier also. We are both young. The happiness we both long for may yet be in store for us.

"It is unthinkable that God should have put this great, wonderful love into your heart and mine only to allow it to remain unrequited. We may be separated from each other for years, but, in the end, dearest, we will be united. And I, for one, Dicky, love you so truly, so dearly, that I am content to assume the burden of years of heartache and homesickness for you, and of actual suffering as well, in hopes and in belief that we

may yet be happy—and if I knew now that our happiness were to be ever so brief, that ultimately it was destined to last only a few months, a few weeks, a week, I would yet be willing to endure all hardship and suffering that intervenes for the sake of my love for you. And you must realize, Dicky, that I am bearing the brunt of this. You, it is true, have the pain of losing me. But in addition to losing you, the frightful anguish is in store for me of a union with Earlcote."

Sobbing, she flung herself into his arms.

"Oh, Dicky," she sobbed, "promise me that you will not rob me of this one ray of hope—this last desperate hope of some day being happy with you, by killing yourself. Promise me! Think, darling, I would have to go on, nevertheless; my part of the bargain would have to be performed, and imagine what a horrible blank, what an unspeakable desert my life is bound to be if I haven't that last straw to cling to."

"Dearest," he put his arm about her and held her close, "dearest, what a cad, what a brute I have been. I promise, darling, I promise anything and everything you ask." He pacified her with caresses, soothed her with gentle kisses.

"And you'll do your level best, Dick, in your work? If you are successful, dear, it will make my cross so much easier to bear."

"I promise," he said solemnly.

Quiet and at peace at last, she lay in his arms. It seemed to him that there was a certain abandon and surrender in her inertia which she had never manifested before. His passion leapt into life anew. He wanted to whisper in her ear and ask her whether at last she loved him fully. But some quality of awe, a look of divine innocence in her face, held him silent.

## CHAPTER XXIX

"So you have come," Earlcote said. He received Betty in a room which she had never been in before. He was sitting in front of an open pine-wood fire which tossed and writhed in fantastic shapes as it sent showers of fiery rain chimneyward. It was at dusk when Betty entered the room, and the wood-fire alone illuminated the gaunt-looking, wainscoted apartment. Gigantic shadows, lean and ghostly looking, flitted across the room. Deep in its recesses, or in another apartment which opened into this, crowded denser shadows clustering about old mahogany which reared itself upward in magnificent but twilight-masked shapes.

"So you have come," Earlcote repeated. "I did not expect you before your year of grace was up."

Betty, upon conciliation bent, began:

"It was kind of you to give me a year of grace."

"Not kind at all," Earlcote interrupted her tartly. "Why did you come before the year was up?"

"Because I told you that I would come as soon as Richard was well."

"Do you expect me to believe that?"

Betty bit her lip. She reminded herself that under every circumstance she must keep a grip upon her temper.

Earlcote continued, roughly:

"Shall I tell you why you come to me now. Because, like most folks, if a disagreeable task is before you, you prefer getting through with it to having it hang over

your head. Conversely, I was willing to give you the year of grace because it prolonged my pleasurable anticipation."

Betty made an heroic effort not to show the alarm that was agitating her.

"It is possible," she said, "that I was not absolutely truthful. Perhaps I came so soon because I hoped that you would be merciful."

"Merciful?"

"And annul our marriage."

"Haven't I explained to you why I married you?"

"Yes, and for precisely that reason I beg of you to let me off. Surely, joy and happiness will be better developers of my voice than fear and unhappiness."

"Sincerity in thinking will be the best developer possible for your voice." Earlcote leaned forward and shot out his hand at Betty as was his habit. She forced herself not to show a tremor as it lay near her, not a yard away, illuminated by the blood-red glow of the fire into a thing of hideous weirdness. "You are one of those women whom pride and self-conceit keep—sometimes for the length of their entire life—from being sincere with themselves."

"What do you mean?" In spite of her resolutions, defiance crept into Betty's voice.

"Fear and unhappiness," Earlcote fairly hissed out the words Betty had used. "What you meant was not fear and unhappiness. It was terror and loathing. But because you hope to mollify me you substituted words intended to quicken my pity without causing me annoyance. Well, am I right?"

"Yes," Betty said, quietly, "you are right. And surely, if there is a grain of manliness in you, you must realize that to force me to marry you with this feeling against you is monstrous."

An intolerable nervousness swept over Betty. To quiet herself, she began walking up and down the long, gloomy apartment.

"You will release me," she cried, "won't you? Oh, I am sure that the hourly torture in which I lived has made a change in my voice. Hasn't it?"

"No, it has not."

"You have not heard me sing."

"I am hearing you talk—entreat. No, no, my estimate of you is right. One thing only, one thing can change you. The consciousness of sinning."

"Sinning?" Betty flared up at last. "Sinning? I and sin? Do you remember the day I vowed that I would rather let Richard die than marry you? I went away from here with the intention of selling myself—you understand—rather than marry you, and at the last moment, call it what you will—education, instinct, morality or breeding—made it impossible for me to commit that particular sin."

"Nevertheless, I tell you that you are about to commit a sin more grievous than the one you ran away from." Earlcote's face, smirking and leering at her in the now almost dark apartment, was hideous to see. "You will realize what a deep-dyed sin it is to marry such as me when you love such as Richard when I hold you in my arms the first time."

"Don't! Don't!" Betty stretched out her hands in supplication.

"That, Betty—for you are my wife and therefore henceforth we must be Betty and Stanley to each other—that, Betty, is the greatest sin a woman can commit, because it is a sin against nature, while the other, the conventional sin, is a sin against society only. That, also, you will comprehend by and by."

Betty held up her hands as if to shield herself against

a physical onslaught. "Don't!" she cried, wildly. "Oh, don't!"

"We grow through sinning," Earlcote continued, ruthlessly. "The sinless person, or he who thinks himself sinless, stagnates, remains stationary, immature and undeveloped. It is through realizing our imperfections, through realizing that sin is the common heritage from which none is immune, that we expand and become strong."

"I do not believe it," Betty cried.

Earlcote disregarded her feeble interpolation. He continued:

"I gave you a chance to sin, to commit a sin of a kind, a sin which, insignificant and small as compared to the sin of being my wife, would, nevertheless, have achieved the result I am anxious to obtain, since it would have troubled your conscience."

The man's cold-blooded devilishness sent the blood simmering to Betty's head.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Would any mature woman ask that question?" Earlcote laughed long and hideously. "I mean this. To what purpose did I give you a year of grace? I counted upon the fact that when you told Richard Pryce of your marriage to me he would beg you to go away with him. Did he?"

"Yes," Betty faltered.

"But you didn't go. You refused. Why? Morality?"

"Honesty, common, every-day honesty," Betty said, indignantly. "Apart from the immorality of such an act, what would I have been but a common cheat if I had broken my pact with you?"

"What is honesty but morality?" Earlcote rasped. "It is one and the same thing. In Anglo-Saxon countries only is the word 'morality' used to denote one par-

ticular brand of honesty. You see, you threw away the golden chance I beneficently gave you of committing an agreeable sin—nothing remains for me but to force upon you a disagreeable sin."

The man's deviltry was amazing. Betty sat mute and helpless and filled with terror that verged on panic before his laughter, which tripped on and on, till her nerves seemed to crack like worn-out violin strings. Suddenly her inertia dropped away. She became terribly, keenly alive to the situation. She began to implore Earlcote to be merciful. She used every possible and impossible argument. She repeated herself; she dragged in irrelevant arguments; she lost control of her nerves; she fell down on her knees before Earlcote; and to that abasement she added the further humiliation contained in frantic words and frenzied gestures such as only extreme and supreme terror can wring from the human heart.

Finally, receiving no reply, she looked up and saw Earlcote's eyes fastened upon her face in a sardonic stare. Something in his look warned her against further abasing herself. Haggard and pale, she staggered to her feet and began brushing the dust from her skirt where she had knelt.

"Well?" Earlcote inquired. "Do you submit to the inevitable? Do you consent to be my wife in fact as well as in name?"

"Apparently," Betty replied, coldly, "there is nothing else to do." A sudden resolution flooded her veins. Other women had endured and suffered. Women had been burned alive at the stake. Women had been drowned for witches. Women in all ages had endured torture in every form and manner. She must not fall below the example set by her sisters in suffering throughout bygone ages. She must acquit herself decently and with dignity.

With that thought uppermost in her mind, she walked with outward composure, her head held high like any queen's on her way to execution, into the dim apartment beyond, toward which Earlcote pointed; and the huge, canopied four-poster looming up out of the darkness seemed to her terrified imagination a scaffold rather than a bed.

# BOOK II

## CHAPTER I

The Metropolitan Opera House, its forbidding pile having lain fallow and in yellow desolation all summer, blossomed out that October in its usual autumn dress of delft-colored posters, on which appeared the notices of the advance sales of seats for subscribers and the general public.

Side by side were announcements of the first appearances in New York of Betty Earlcote, as Isolde, and of Richard Pryce, "The world's most intellectual pianist," at the opening Sunday night concert.

Two men, both groomed to a finish, and marked by the unmistakable air which distinguishes successful and prosperous artists, stood studying the two neighboring posters from different angles. Suddenly, shifting their positions, their eyes met.

"Richard Pryce, as I live by bread!"

"How d'ye do, Archie!"

Richard, whom Betty had never told of Archie's perfidy, extended his hand more graciously than he would have done of old. Time abrases certain impressions, and Richard, arriving home after five years abroad, was almost glad to see a familiar face. His graciousness, moreover, was authoritative. Of the two, Richard was now by far the more famous. Heralded by every critic of reputation on the Continent and in England as the pianist whose virtuosity and intelligence were bound to make him eclipse all living pianists, his manner, though unassuming and quiet, showed that calm, invincible,

tranquil assurance worn only by men and women whose position, social or artistic, is absolutely unassailable.

Richard's quick eye noted certain changes in the Adonis of the stage, who, to combat the ravages of time and fast living, was now forced to resort to painting his face when on the street, like any demi-mondaine or superannuated beauty.

"Four years at least since we've met," Archie commented. He was secretly a little envious of Richard's manner, proclaiming as it did the man who has outdistanced all competitors in his own particular walk of life. Archie Telfer, who had outdistanced others only by the prowess of his personal beauty, was rapidly declining from the zenith to the nadir of his reputation.

Richard corrected him.

"Five years, Archie. I've been abroad five years. Think of it! Studied for four years and have been concertizing one year."

"And now you will tour our savage Continent."

"Our savage Continent," Richard smiled, gravely, "stands for shekels. The enlightened Continent from which I have just come stands for fame. I've achieved the one, and now I am coming home to gather in the other."

"So even you have not wholly escaped the mercenary taint," Archie mused. "In the olden days you were all moonshine and romance."

"Not wholly—nor is the mercenary taint very deep now. But lack of money, Archie, caused a great grief in my life, years ago—and now that I have the earning capacity, I am going to earn money—all I can. Heaven knows how and when I may use it."

"Heavens," said Archie, "that sounds quite tragic." He pulled his still handsome face into a grave pattern. "By the way, that was a curious ending to your

romance. How in all the world did little Betty Garside, whom they now acclaim to be the world's greatest Isolde, come to marry that beast of an Earlcote, after being engaged to you for a year?"

"Are you sure her marriage marked the end of our romance?" Richard asked gently. "I have never considered that it did. I have always considered her marriage to Earlcote merely as an interlude. Life would have been insupportable had I taken any other view of the affair. I believe that our romance—Betty's and mine—is yet to come."

"Not really? You interest me," Archie exclaimed. "You know, my dear chap, I myself was a little smitten with Betty Garside—not very deeply, you understand, but I paid her the homage which every man ought to pay every pretty woman. I fell just a little in love with her. By the by—I cannot comprehend how she can play 'Carmen'? And they say she is magnificent—greater than Calvé."

"Why shouldn't she be? You heard her sing that night at the Direktor's. Her voice was incomparable even then. And now she has had the benefit of Earlcote's training."

"I'm not speaking of her voice, Pryce. I'm speaking of the part as a part. No singer can make a success of 'Carmen' unless she acts as magnificently as she sings. And consider, Betty Garside, all snow and ice—playing 'Carmen,' that 'she-rose out of hell,' as Swinburne called her. Can you reconcile the two?"

Richard shrugged his shoulders.

"We will see and hear to-morrow evening," he said. "They've changed the bill from 'Tristan and Isolde' to 'Carmen' on the opening night. Isolde follows two nights later. I suppose you will be present at both operas?"

"You forget, I am less fortunate than yourself," Archie replied. "I am playing Mark Antony in a revival of 'Julius Cæsar.' So I won't be able to be on hand at the opera."

"I condole with you."

"But, as I work while you play and play while you work, I will be able to hear you at Sunday night's concert. I look forward to that with pleasure."

"So good of you to say so," said Richard, indifferently. His face was wholly devoid of expression.

The two men parted. Richard crossed the wide lobby of the opera house, and halted before an enormous frame showing Betty as "Carmen" in every conceivable posture and scene. To Archie, Richard had spoken with something like indifference of Betty as an artist; in reality, he felt the most acute and poignant interest. He, too, had his misgivings as to her ability to portray "Carmen." His little Betty, so pure and white and innocent—how was she to play convincingly the part of the most infamous of all operatic heroines?

The past seemed very real. Was Betty happy in her success as an artist? Had she overcome her aversion for Earlcote? Had she, perhaps, forgotten himself, Richard? She had interdicted correspondence, and he had had no direct news from her for years. It did not seem possible that the famous Betty Earlcote should waste any thought, any heartburnings on him. Then he remembered that, in his way, he was quite as famous as she in hers, and that it was possible that she was entertaining like doubts of him.

But after hearing her in "Carmen" the next evening, a terrible unrest and doubt came to him. A woman of Betty's character and temperament—a woman all pristine purity and single-mindedness, who could give so vivid and compelling a portrayal of a woman whose sinister

motives and callous diablerie made her the exact antithesis of herself, was indeed one of the world's greatest prima donnas. A few nights later he heard her as Isolde, heard her unmatchable and bell-like voice sing with a crescendo of passion and abandon that made the audience delirious with appreciative joy—and terrified him beyond measure.

Was this the same Betty he had known? Was all that passionate outpouring of love, that sweetly feminine surrender of herself merely histrionic art? He could not believe it. Carmen had been a *tour de force*. Isolde, however, must be a subtle reading of the feelings agitating her own heart, and, himself agitated with a profound and searching jealousy, he began to cast about for the causes and the personality that had worked this amazing change in Betty. Was it Earlcote himself? Was she in love with her husband?

Richard went to his hotel that night in a state of supreme wretchedness. Through the entire five years of their separation he had never ceased to love her. No other woman had stirred him, none had moved them. Friends he had made among women, but Betty, alone among women, seemed to him to possess the ineffable charm which always brought to mind a flower; Betty, alone among women, had appealed to his manhood. As time went by, his desire sank somewhat into the background. But his love for her was all the more secure, because purged. He thought of her almost as if she were dead, once the detestable vision of imagining her in Earlcote's arms became less obstreperous. But now, having seen her in the glory of her mature womanhood, the world at her feet, singing in a voice whose purity was unapproachable, herself instinct with every emotion of womanhood, his passion leapt to the fore again and his jealousy of Earlcote assumed dimensions and a viril-

ity which beggared the proportions of his jealousy in the past.

Richard spent a sleepless night. When morning came, his nerves were frayed, jangling, raw things, and his brain a soppy something, like a wet sponge, that lodged in the rear of his head. It was the day of his opening recital—Saturday—the day preceding the concert at the opera house for which he was billed. He telephoned his management that he would not be able to play that afternoon, and went back to bed, harassed by the most absurd fears, and when his excited manager succeeded in forcing his way into Richard's room, he found Richard in a state bordering on hysteria.

"Vot has habbened?" Herr Hengstler, being a South German, rounded off the sharp corners of some dentals and labials and gave a raw edge to others.

Richard said, violently:

"I cannot play."

"For vy?"

"Because I am sick. I heard Betty Garside sing last night."

"Almost could I inver vrom zhat zhat you are seek because you heard Betty Earlcote seeng," said Herr Hengstler, mopping his dome-like pate with an enormous linen handkerchief.

Richard raised himself on his elbow.

"You know," he said, "don't you, that she and I were engaged to be married years ago?"

"Booh! Vot apout zhat?" Herr Hengstler meant to say "Pooh," but invariably produced the monosyllable supposed to be used in frightening the timid. "Booh—divorced beoble hear each other seeng and blay and eet does not make them seek."

"I'm sick," Richard continued, "because, compared to

her I am a miserable dummy, a ninny, a know-nothing. I'll not play."

"Py heafen, you must and veel play!" shouted Herr Hengstler, the perspiration, of which all traces had been finally mopped away, breaking out afresh in great beads upon his brow. "You must and veel! Do you vant to ruin me? Zhink of zhe adverteesements, a dollar a line haf I bayed for some, and zhe bress noteeces."

"I don't care a rap whether I ruin you or not," Richard responded, amiably, "I am not going to ruin my reputation by playing when I know in advance that I am going to be a dire, dismal failure."

"For vy? You a vailure? For vy?"

"I worked all these years in hopes of having Mrs. Earlcote hear me play some day," Richard continued, "and now I know, after hearing her sing, that she won't bother to hear me at all. She's forgotten me."

"And pecause a girl vot you were engaged to half a century ago isn't bining to deazh for you, you refuse to blay? You are grazy—*Nehmen Sie es mir nicht uebel,* you are grazy."

"Don't you dare say that to me again," Richard shouted, sitting up in bed. "I know I would play lamentably this afternoon, my nerves are shattered by a sleepless night, and I won't have her hear me play like a fourth-rate automaton."

"Fun moment you say she ees not goming, fun moment you say she ees," roared fat Herr Hengstler. "Vot eees eet, zhen? You talk like an hysterical woman. Come, pull yourself together, or you weel preak down at the beeano zhis afternoon."

"What?" Richard vaulted out of bed and confronted the amazed Hengstler, indignantly. "Did you ever know me to break down? Do you think I lack self-control?

Oh, yes, I will play this afternoon. I will play, if only to show you that I never break down. I'll be down with brain fever to-morrow, or typhus, or something from the diabolical strain you are subjecting me to—you inhuman threshing machine—but I'll play, I'll play, I'll play!"

And, forthwith, Richard sat down at the piano, accoutered in only his pajamas, and began playing a rhapsody by Liszt.

The astounded Hengstler, too astounded to mop away the beads of perspiration that were purling down his fat face, held up his hands in thanksgiving at the unexpected turn events had taken and at the total lack of consistency and self-control of all artists, European and American alike, and silently made his way from the room, believing, like a wise man, that it is best to leave well enough alone.

Richard played that afternoon in the concert hall as he had never played before, but to him it seemed that he was touching not keys of a piano but nerves as raw and palpitating as his own. He endured torments while he played—but he played, bowing automatically between numbers to acknowledge the enthusiastic and uproarious applause.

When he had played his last number, he refused absolutely to give an encore. Hengstler besought him, in tears, not to merit the charge of being "stingy" upon this, his first performance, but he was not to be moved. He was, in fact, in a state of nervous collapse. He threw a horseshoe of flowers at his valet who ventured to hand him his muffler before he wanted it, and he mortally offended a critic of one of the largest and most substantial evening papers in the city by telling him that the entire press of New York City was subsidized by the billionaires and the opinion of not a single critic was worth a pot of beans. Poor, fat, perspiring Heng-

stler unwound yards of mispronounced eloquence to pacify the irate critic.

Still plunged in unaccountable depression of spirits, Richard then motored through the park, and when he reached his hotel the clerk handed him a letter on very thick, white notepaper, addressed to himself in Betty's hand. And, lo! suddenly the world was bathed in glory, and even effete critics of a subsidized press seemed kith and kin. Under an electric light suspended from a plush-covered pillar he tore open the envelope and read its contents eagerly.

"DICKY—You have heard me sing twice and didn't show me the courtesy of calling to tell me what you think of my voice. I am writing to ask you to call, because, having heard you play only once, I want to tell you what I think of your playing.—BETTY.

"P.S. Call either to-night or to-morrow at six o'clock sharp."

Richard rushed from the lobby like a madman, hailed a taxi and, within a few minutes, found himself at the door of Betty's apartment-house. The clock on Times Square pointed to six o'clock as he followed the maid through the hall into a small, old rose and gold reception-room.

The room bore the imprint of a woman's personality, but it was a personality which he did not know. A mass of bibelots were displayed on a table in one corner of the room, little porcelain shepherdesses, tea-cups, an egg-shell vase, a Chinese head-dress profusely ornamented with seed-pearls and feathers of the king bird, and a host of other *objets de vertu* such as his Betty would formerly have passed with a shrug of the shoulders. A filmy lace handkerchief, which she had evidently dropped, lay under the table. He picked it up, noted

that it was scented, though ever so faintly, with violets and that her initials were embroidered above the point lace edge, not once, but repeatedly, the individual letters joining hands rather than interlacing, so as to form an embroidered border above the point-lace edging. Richard read the B. E. B. E. repeated endless-chain fashion, over and over again, and it struck him as singular that the little Betty he had known, so artless and simple in her tastes and shrinkingly unassuming, should own a handkerchief such as this.

He sat down, with the handkerchief in his hand and contemplated it gravely for a long time. That together with her stationery, the sea-green, ermine-lined coat of which he had a glimpse as the maid carried it through the hall, all spoke of a Betty very different from the Betty he had known. Her stage presence had dazed him, her voice and beauty had intoxicated and inflamed him, and now the little intimacies of toilet and taste of which he was being vouchsafed a glimpse, frightened him. He wished he had not come. He feared disillusionment and chid himself for being disloyal for harboring the thought.

Suddenly he became aware that she had entered the room.

He rose and looked at her, fear in his eyes, a multiple, compound fear which he could not have anaylzed. There was no fear in her eyes, only friendliness, the same sweet friendliness as of old. Her figure remained unchanged. It was as girlish and svelte as ever, but her face showed the firm, strong lines of a woman who had suffered much, and those lines, which in no way marred her beauty but merely gave it strength and character, touched him as deeply as her voice had touched him.

She smiled, stretched out both hands, and said:

"Aren't you going to tell me that you are glad to see me?"

"Glad!" he echoed rather asininely.

"Glad—yes, Dicky. And, Dicky, you disappointed me horribly at your recital."

He flushed.

"Not as bad as that, I hope?"

"Dicky, Dicky—don't you remember that you and I agreed you would enter from the left side of the stage, so that the audience would not perceive the slight Tower-of-Pisa-like formation of your nose? And, after all, you weakly followed time-honored tradition and came in from the right side."

Richard laughed. Embroidered handkerchiefs and bibelots to the contrary, this was the same old Betty he had known and loved and still loved.

"Betty," he said, in a low, tender voice, "you are adorable."

"I've been told so before," she laughed, "by yourself And your playing, Dick—your playing . . ."

"Say nothing, Betty," he implored. "I didn't want to play. I was in no mood to play. I just knew you would come, and I knew I would play abominably, and I did."

"Abominably? Oh, Dick—you played marvelously—marvelously." She stood facing him across a small satin-wood table. "Didn't you know, Dicky, honor bright, that you played ravishingly?"

"Really? You're not just saying it?" he asked incredulously.

"No, Dicky. Other pianists play with their fingers, but you play with your naked soul. What did George Sand call Chopin—Velvet Fingers? I think, Dick, I will call you Magic Soul. Oh, Dick—your life was worth saving, wasn't it?"

Her sweetness, her charm, so well remembered, yet imbued with a new, indescribable something, sent the

blood pulsing through his veins. He walked around the table and stood beside her.

"Betty, Betty," he stammered, "let me kiss you. I'm more madly in love with you than ever. Betty, Betty, all these years I have lived with your image, yours only, in my heart. Why did you send for me? Was it right to let me come here, to ask me to come, if you and I are to treat each other like mere friends? Betty, Betty, why don't you answer me?"

She stood with lowered eyes, on her lips a sweet smile the subtler inwardness of which evaded him.

"Betty, may I kiss you?"

"No."

"Betty—it is not for me to question your denial, but answer me one question truthfully. Surely, a woman who sings Isolde as you do, cannot take offense—at—love?"

"That is quite true."

Still the strange smile hovered upon her lips. His arm seemed to be raised by an occult power, and he crooked it into a circle to steal it about her waist, and then the same strange power seemed to push his face forward, forward, to bring his lips near and nearer and still nearer to hers.

"Betty," he whispered, "Betty."

"No, Dicky, you mustn't kiss me. I am another man's wife. Not on his account—but on yours and mine. We must not smirch our beautiful love, Dick."

His arm fell limply to his side.

"Oh, Betty," he cried, "I cannot give you up again. I won't. I gave you up once—but you're mine, you were meant to be mine by Nature, Heaven and Providence."

She had contrived to place the table between them again.

"I am glad," she said, quietly, "that you love me still,

for though what you speak of is passion and not love, I know now that the two are indissoluble. I am glad, Dick, more glad than I can say that you still feel as you do."

"Did you ever doubt me, Betty?"

"I have a confession to make, Dick. Yes, I did doubt you. I doubted your love, for five years is a long, long time for a man to remain true to a recollection. And a long time ago, Dick, I doubted you in another way—although that, too, had to do with your love, and that old doubt of long ago has plagued and tormented me all these years."

"What was the doubt?" he asked, in surprise.

She shook her head.

"I cannot tell you—not to-day. Later on—perhaps—to-day there are too many other things, things of vital importance to us both, to tell you."

"What things?"

"Let us sit down." She led the way to two chairs, placed as if for an eternal tête-à-tête, and in following her, he noticed the graceful undulations of her body, as she walked. This, too, was a new attribute, and he wondered anew that the present Betty could be so like and so unlike the Betty of the past. It did not occur to him that a similar change had taken place in himself, that his exterior, too, was the conventional, polished, machine-made exterior of the man of the world and fashion.

He seated himself beside her and waited for her to begin, leaning forward so that, if she chose, she might lower her voice in speaking.

"Dick," she said, "I will have to touch on some unpleasant topics. You will forgive me for that when we get to the end of our talk. Of course, you remember Kitty Florence, alias Katarina della Florenzia?"

Did he remember the cause of his troubles and tribulations?

"I saw her last week. She called on me."

"You should not have received her."

"I declined to at first. She persevered, and finally sent in a note couched in terms so urgent and insistent that I consented to see her. And I am very glad that I did. What do you think she told me?"

"Well?"

"Dick—you never attempted to justify yourself for your wrongdoing, and in those days I was such an ignorant, innocent little simpleton that I did not guess that a man, quite as much as a woman, can be led astray. I might have judged you less harshly had I known. Why didn't you tell me?"

"How could I? I couldn't, you know, without offending your modesty and reticence."

"Well, Dick, Kitty told me the other day that she had been paid by Earlcote to bring about your downfall."

"Incredible!" Dick sprang to his feet and began prancing up and down, fingers at work in his hair, with the gesture she recalled so well. "What was the object?"

Betty repeated the story Kitty had told her.

"She received in return the Kasi-Nook, Earlcote's famous black opal. You remember the verse:

*Honestly come by,*
*Fortune and joy,*
*And health it will buy.*
*Dishonestly come by,*
*Health, wealth and joy,*
*It will surely destroy.*

Well, Dick, her health is gone, and so are her looks. She is merely a shadow of the Kitty you knew. I'll not go into harrowing details. Of course, loss of beauty

involved loss of livelihood. She was reduced to such a state that she was forced to sell her jewels, among them being the Kasi-Nook. And now, Dick, a strange thing happened. The other gems she sold without difficulty, though at a loss. But the Kasi-Nook no jeweler she went to, and she tells me she visited a baker's dozen, was willing to purchase. The reason they gave for their unwillingness was the bad reputation of the jewel. Then she remembered that Earlcote had warned her when she insisted on this particular gem as the purchase price for the infamy he wished her to perpetrate. Well, Dicky, to phrase it vulgarly, she lost her nerve. We stage-folks, they say, are all, more or less, superstitious. At any rate, though it sounds like bally nonsense, Kitty became so terrified that she thought the curse might still be lifted from her if she came and made a clean breast of the whole, miserable, sordid story to me."

Betty drew a small, shagreen bag from her bodice. This she opened and took from it a gem which she held out to Dick on the palm of her right hand.

"Behold," she said, laughing, "the hoodoo gem of Australia—the great black opal, the Kasi-Nook."

"Gad, but it is beautiful." Richard surveyed it with intense interest. "You weren't foolish enough to allow her to get rid of it to you were you?" he queried abruptly.

Betty laughed.

"Yes, Dicky, since I am on the stage, I, too, have grown superstitious, and you must remember, dear, that the Kasi-Nook confers happiness on them that come by it honestly. Now poor Kitty gave it to me in hopes of getting rid of the curse—so that I have come by it not merely honestly, but have done a good deed in acquiring it."

Dick asked in amazement,

"You don't really believe in this tommyrot, do you?"

But she would not be serious with him. She jested, she cajoled, she teased, she pretended now to one thing and now to another. As he listened to her his eyes grew very tender.

"Dearest," he murmured, "you are adorable."

"Hush, you must not call me that just yet."

*"Just yet?"*

"Did you really think, Dicky, that I asked you to come and see me just to torment you, just to let you see, you know, what you had lost? For I am worth while now, am I not, Dicky?" She retreated from both his eyes and hands. "And that, Dicky, is where the black opal comes in. It is going to bring good luck to you and me. And don't you see, Dicky, the very fact that it has given me this belief means that the battle is half won?"

"I do not know what battle you are speaking of, Betty, but I do know that there is soon going to be an almighty scrap between that—that—between your husband and myself."

"No, Dicky, you must leave it to me to deal with him."

"Absolutely not, Betty. Henceforth I am going to take matters into my hands. I am not the weak, romantic, half-sick boy I was five years ago." He was tramping the room, his fingers busy with his heavy crop of hair, and to all intents he looked not a whit older or more manly than at the immature period of which he spoke so disparagingly. Betty repressed a smile. Intuitively she felt that she had changed more than he. She believed herself to be more mature in her outlook upon life and more competent to deal with its problems. And the old doubt of years ago, the doubt of which she had spoken to him, the doubt which had harassed her so cruelly all these years, the doubt that he would not make nearly as great a sacrifice for her as she had made for him sud-

denly sprang luminously to the front, confronting her with glaring insolence, like an impudent, staring electric sign. She repressed her agitation; she told herself that such was the law the world over—the woman's willingness to bear and suffer so much more for the man she loves than the man would be willing to endure and suffer for her. Then she reproached herself for these thoughts, accused herself of being morbid because she dwelt so much on woman's superior moral caliber; probably her own sex took a sort of unhealthy pleasure in suffering of this altruistic sort.

"Yes, sir," Dick continued, emphatically, without interrupting his walk through the small room, "yes, sir, I am going to deal with that husband of yours."

"How?" Betty took no pains to hide her amusement.

"How?" Dick echoed. "I don't know, but never you fear, I shall deal with him, deal with him summarily, that's all."

"Listen to me, Dicky boy. You have no weapon at your command to fight Earlcote. I have. And I am going to use it."

"It's not to be thought of, Betty. I have got to see him."

"What a firecracker it is—just like you always were. Come and sit down beside me, like a good little boy, and listen to the plan I have incubated."

Obediently he came and sat down beside her. She resumed:

"When Earlcote forced his cruel bargain upon me, I believed that he had played fair; that is, I believed that he was merely taking advantage of circumstances which chance had thrown in his way. In consequence I dealt fairly with him. Now, however, since I know that he was instrumental in shaping the circumstances which made me his prey, I consider myself free of the agree-

ment, and to-night I shall tell him so. Remember, Dicky boy, it is the singer, not the woman he cares for—so he has always declared, and because of this peculiar condition I will be able to apply the thumb-screws to him. Unless he agrees to a divorce, I am going to refuse to sing. I will break my contract with the opera—you know what that means? In addition to heavy loss of money, in the way of indemnity, for which Earlcote will not care, there will be a terrific scandal; wild, fantastic rumors concerning my voice will be spread, which, in turn, will reflect upon my teacher himself. He is almost as proud of my voice—which his monumental egotism makes him describe as an instrument upon which his musicianship enables him to play—as he used to be of his piano playing. That is my bludgeon, and I am going to use it. I do not, as a rule, approve of divorces, but I feel that the entire history of my marriage is such a monstrous outrage that I am justified in securing a divorce and in remarrying."

"But if you fail, Betty?"

"I won't fail," she said, doggedly.

"But if you do, Betty, will you come away with me?"

"It is unthinkable that I should fail."

"You are very sure!"

"I know Earlcote only too well. There will be a terrific scene, and then I will carry the day."

"I do not believe he will consent to give you your freedom," said Dick. "I do not see, Betty, how a man who is your husband, whose wife you have been and are, can be willing to give you up. Betty, Betty, you are a superbly beautiful woman and, oh, God! The thought that you have been that man's wife drives me mad! And, more cruel still and more harassing is the thought that there must have been times when you did not hate him."

"Dick," Betty said very quietly, "it will calm you to know that for over a year and a half we have not lived as man and wife."

He did not speak, but looked at her with unbelieving eyes.

"Dick," she said, gently, "why do you torture yourself with thoughts like these in your mind at present? It is unworthy of you. You cast a terrible slur on me a moment ago. If, loving you, I had ever thought with love of another man, though that man was my husband, would I be myself?"

"But, Betty, I do not understand—you are such a womanly woman now—if Earlcote did not work the change in you, who did?"

"I cannot answer that question at the present moment. It involves too many things touching yourself, too many things, dear, that I cannot say to you while I bear another man's name."

"Betty!"

"Yes, Dicky boy. As soon as I have Earlcote's consent to a divorce you shall know all and everything, and he will set me free. He will have to. The glory of having cultivated my voice will outweigh the pleasure of labelling me as his possession, particularly as I am willing to agree to retain his name on the operatic stage and to continue my career. Ah, Dicky, Dicky, if I had my way, I would never sing in public—the greatest happiness in the world would come to me as your wife, your wife, Dick, in every sense of the word your wife—your wife, do you understand?"

"Betty!" He was intensely touched. "If you feel that way, sweetheart, why, instead of making a new bargain with that arch-fiend—why, I say, not come away with me? Think of George Eliot and Lewes! Did any one blame them? A few Pharisees, perhaps. You would be

my wife and I your husband as surely as if we were thrice married."

"No, dear. Much as I dislike the limelight, and I dislike it exceedingly, much more than you, who love it, can guess—I feel that I must choose what I consider the only honorable way—the only way, I mean, that would not bring dishonor to you and me."

"Your dislike of the stage seems very odd to me," Dick said. "I love it, Betty, I love it dearly. I have often wondered whether I was sufficiently grateful to you for saving my life, by sacrificing yourself. Oh, Betty, the glorious, divine feeling of knowing, at a recital, that you sway thousands of human souls, that thousands of human hearts beat in unison with yours. In spite of my continual heart-hunger for you, dearest, this last year has been a year of superlative satisfaction."

"I am happy to know you are happy, Dicky."

"I did not speak of happiness, dearest. I spoke of satisfaction."

"Are happiness and satisfaction not the same?"

"No, satisfaction is joy in doing, happiness is joy in living, and wonderful as is the emotion of feeling that you impose your mood—be it merry, or sad, or contemplative—upon myriads of human beings, the joy, dear, of having the right to hold you in my arms as my wife would far transcend the other joy."

"I am afraid, Dicky boy, that you hitched on the last phrase only out of gallantry."

"Betty! I have often wondered whether I would have been grateful to you at all for saving my life if I had not received the scholarship which made possible my artistic career. You see, I am telling you this because I do not want you to think me better than I am. But circumstances played into your hands. And I am grateful, extremely grateful, to you."

For one moment she was sorely tempted to tell him the truth concerning the scholarship. She hated to have a lie, even so virtuous and kindly a one, between herself and him. Then her delicacy prevailed, and she remained silent. Womanly fineness of feeling told her that while he, the man, could gratefully accept his life at her hands, and acknowledge that indebtedness, it would be humiliating for him to be told after all these years that he owed her his career as well.

"Do not use the word 'grateful,' Dicky—it is such a horrid, horrid word. I want only your love, dearest. Oh, surely, there is no sin in calling you that now. Dearest, dearest . . ." She extended her hands to him, and reverently he lifted them to his lips. The light that shone from her face was undimmed by any mundane emotion. Richard felt the sanctity of the moment, and his passion sank back into smouldering embers before the overwhelming force of this woman's beauty of soul. "Dearest, dearest," she repeated, "I have earned you, I am going to have you, and you must never speak of gratitude again. To do so is to load our love down in chains."

"But, Betty, what if he refuses a divorce?"

"How you hark back to that, Dick! I tell you it is unthinkable. He will not refuse."

"Then, if you are so certain, you ought not to be afraid to promise me what I ask of you in case of failure."

Betty's face became very grave. He continued:

"You hesitate—that means that you are not as certain, as you are trying to make yourself believe, of the outcome of your ultimatum."

"From your viewpoint, Dicky, I can see the justice of what you say."

"Dearest, I shall go mad unless you give me some

assurance. Promise, in case Earlcote refuses, that you will come away with me and openly proclaim that you consider yourself my wife. Surely, you must realize that you are justified in doing this—that in taking this step, your conduct is sincere, courageous, noble and in no way base or low."

Arms crossed over her bosom, Betty sat in silence for a moment. Then she answered him:

"You are right. I am justified in taking such a step. My marriage to Earlcote, while he insisted upon its being a marriage, was a ghastly mockery, an infernal farce. Cruel? I have promised to tell you all some day."

"Then you promise?"

"What was I to promise you?" she asked, her eyes fixed blindly upon a distant point, reminiscently seeing past horrors.

"Betty!" he cried in anguish. What must she have suffered for his sake to ask so wandering a question. "Betty, you were to promise me that if Earlcote will not consent to a divorce . . ."

"Yes, yes, I remember. Very well, Dicky, I promise. You are right. If we are forced to take this step we are not doing an immoral thing. We are strictly within our right."

"Betty," his arm crept about her, "Betty, sweetheart, may I kiss you now?"

"No, Dicky. Would clandestine kisses not make us lose our self-respect, our respect for each other? Very soon I will be yours, yours to hold, to kiss, to enfold—yours, entirely yours. But married or unmarried, there must be nothing surreptitious in our love, nothing to vulgarize it, to debase it from a noble passion into a low intrigue."

"Betty, Betty, you are splitting hairs." He could

scarcely contain himself. "Be merciful, darling; be merciful, sweetheart, and let me kiss you."

His lips became audacious. Gently placing her fingers upon his lips, she pushed him away.

"Dicky," she said, tenderly, "I have borne and endured many things for you. When I tell you what I have promised to tell you, tell you all that language can in decency convey, after I have stripped my heart naked for you to see, and if I had the power to use lurid and inflammatory diction in painting the misery I endured for years, then ultimately you might have a dim notion, a vague idea of the purgatory I lived through. All that I endured for you, but there is one thing I could not endure—to be disappointed in you. I could not bear, Dicky, to think that you would be willing to do a dishonorable thing."

He drew back as if stung by a whip.

"Dishonorable?" he asked. "That's a strong word to use, isn't it, for my desire for a kiss?"

She did not reply, she merely looked at him, and looking into her clear, clean eyes, the full import of her words and the justice of them dawned slowly upon him. But while he looked, the old persistent doubt began to harass and torment her again. Would he have done as much for her as she for him?

She shook off the harrowing suspicion. She loved him, and there is unwisdom in doubting where we love.

"Dicky," she said, "to-morrow evening I sing in "La Tosca." After the performance I will see Earlcote. He comes in from Earlcote Manor whenever I sing, and after the performance he dines or sups with me and criticizes my interpretation."

Richard snorted out the one word, "Presumption."

"Not at all, Dicky. His criticisms are always profitable. At any rate, after supper, I will broach the sub-

ject. We will have a lively night. I will send you a note the next morning as to the immediate outcome. Of the ultimate outcome I have no doubt."

"Why not write me as soon as you know? A night of suspense will be unendurable."

"If there is time, I will. But I fancy we will continue our session until the small hours of the morning."

She rose and began pacing the floor. Finally, in a low, vibrant voice, she commanded:

"You had better go now, Dicky."

"Let me stay a little longer," he begged. "Oh, Betty, Betty, the inconceivable bliss of being with you like this with the sweet familiar intimacy of bygone days."

"Please go."

"Why?"

She did not reply, merely looked at him, and he comprehended that her insistence arose from her fear that her self-control was going. It was a new aspect of her. The color mounted to her cheeks, her sweet lips were tremulous, her eyes glowed with passion. Her entire person breathed of love and ardor and longing for him.

"Dick," she murmured, "go, dear, please go. I do not want to throw myself in your arms, and I am longing to do just that. I am longing, dearest, to lie against your heart, to feel your arms about me, to feel your lips against my cheek and upon my mouth. Go, dearest—go."

She covered her face with her hands. He stood irresolute, filled with an almost irresistible desire to strain her to his breast, to kiss the nape of her neck, yet wanting to do as she asked. A man less delicate-minded than Richard would have made the mistake of construing her words as an invitation to take the initiative, and for fear of offending her modesty, would have kissed her with an exaggerated ardor. But what she had said to

him about maintaining their self-respect and their respect for each other was luminously impressed upon his memory. Because her viewpoint seemed so unusual, he paid her the tribute of recognizing her utter sincerity in speaking as she had done. It seemed to him that to kiss her or to take her into his arms in this moment of her weakness, or even to touch her hand caressingly, would be to take an unfair advantage of her.

He loved her holily as well as passionately, and he was incapable of doing anything that would lower her in her own estimation. He must, if necessary, as in this instance, protect her against herself.

Quietly he walked to the door. Standing there, he said:

"I am going, Betty, as you wish."

Her hands fell away from her face. He saw that she had regained her self-control completely, but her lips moved as if in silent prayer. Suddenly she stretched out her hands and came toward him. She spoke rapidly.

"Dick, it was sweet of you to be strong while my weakness lasted." She placed her hands on his shoulders. "I knew I was not mistaken in you," she said. "I knew you were just that sort of a man. God bless you and keep you."

## CHAPTER II

Dick spent the following day in wandering about his former haunts. He did not share Betty's sanguineness, and he had an abiding sense of impending disaster. He waited in the lobby of his hotel until long after one o'clock in the morning, nursing the hope that he would receive a message of some sort from Betty. Then, his nervous force at low ebb from the terrific nervous strain he had been under, he went to his rooms.

By half-past five he was awake, and by six he was entirely dressed. An intolerable nervousness possessed him. He decided that, unless he heard from her by ten o'clock, he would go to her apartment and ask to see her, her wishes to the contrary notwithstanding.

He had just seated himself in the restaurant, with the intention of drinking a cup of black coffee when a messenger boy came running into the dining-room, shouting his name. Richard claimed the letter the boy carried. It was from Betty.

"DEAREST:

"Earlcote refuses. Await me. Will be with you almost immediately after letter reaches you.

"BETTY."

Richard swallowed the cup of coffee hastily, and pushing aside the rolls which the waiter had brought him, went to the lobby. He consulted his watch. It was precisely half-past seven. Eons afterwards, it seemed to him, when he had looked at it again the hand had moved one minute.

Viciously he thrust the watch into his pocket and began walking up and down the long hall. Time crawled by and finally, at eight o'clock, Betty walked into the lobby. She had come afoot, and though there were deep circles under her eyes, the raw November morning had painted her cheeks a healthy red.

She greeted Richard with a very grave face.

"Where can we speak uninterruptedly?" she asked. Without replying, he led the way to one of the small rooms opening out from the lobby. At this hour of the morning it was entirely deserted.

"Well, Richard, Earlcote not only refused to divorce me—he threatened to have me incarcerated as insane if I insisted on breaking my contract with the Metropolitan Opera by refusing to sing. He agreed to let me have twenty-four hours to think matters over. That was at three o'clock this morning, after a four hours' session. The game's up, Dick. I am glad now, dearest, that you foresaw this possibility, and exacted the promise you did. Earlcote tells me he will have no difficulty in getting alienists to pronounce me insane if I persist in refusing to sing. That may be so, if I remain with him. But if you and I openly declare our intentions, I do not believe any alienist of character would dare risk his reputation by alleging that I am out of my mind. I am sure of it."

"So am I," said Dick, and suddenly, in a rush of joy, he realized the import of her words. She had come to him to give herself to him as if she were indeed his wife. And the happiness which he felt made great waves of dizziness vibrate through his head.

"Dick," said Betty, speaking quickly and with subdued passion, "Dick, you will never make me regret, will you, what I am about to do? My reason and my heart tell me that I am justified in coming to you like this, but deep down, Dicky, my girlhood training, in-

stinct, breeding, love of convention, assert themselves and I feel that I am about to do a very terrible thing in leaving the man I am married to—no matter how bitterly and with what cause I hate him—for another man. Dick, promise me that you will never give me cause to regret the step I am taking; that, in no way, I will sink in your estimation for taking it."

"Betty," he showered burning kisses upon her gloved hand. Then, deftly unclasping the glove, he pulled it down until it adhered only to her finger tips, and now he kissed the back of her hand and then, turning it about, he kissed the dainty palm, and suddenly he pulled off her glove and was kissing her finger tips, crushing them passionately in the hollow of his hand.

"Betty, Betty, how can I prove to you that I would not have suggested this thing to you if I did not believe it right? I do not wish to deal in platitudes. But surely your own reason must tell you, Betty, that to a case as isolated and unique as ours the ordinary criterion of conduct cannot be applied with justice."

"Do not all lovers think their case unique?" Betty interpolated.

"Ours is unique," he repeated, dogmatically. "And your sensibility must tell you how grotesque and hideous was the sin Earlcote forced upon you—you, all purity and chastity and innocence—when he made you his wife."

"It is curious, Dick," replied Betty, "on the day I went to Earlcote Manor, after you had regained your health—the day that shut me off from you for five long years, Earlcote said precisely the same thing to me—that it was a sin for a woman to marry a man she does not love. And I was soon to know that he was right—that such a union is not merely a flagrant outrage to every instinct of decency, but that it is sin, blood-red, deep-dyed sin,

a sin not merely against a woman's own self, but against nature at large. And, Dick, he prophesied that comprehension and sympathy would come through sin, and he was right. Even sin has its uses. That seems a curious thing to say. But all that has happened seems so strangely interbound. I realize now that if I had been just a little different as a girl, a little less cold, a little less 'pure,' as I then termed it, you, my Dicky boy, would never have thought that I would be happier as a singer than as your wife and you would not have entered my name at the contest; Earlcote would never have heard me sing, and, in consequence, would not have resorted to foul means to bring about a rupture between us. Or, if he had resorted to foul play, in order to sidetrack you—you, Richard, would not have gone wrong. I failed you—you wished to spare me, to be sweet and tender and reverent with me—and you paid dearly for your attitude. And I paid, too, we both know how terribly. But in paying, I was broadened. I am a better and stronger and broader woman because of the ordeal I have been through, and I feel that my love for you has an element which it would have lacked if I had been spared the suffering I went through. My love for you is deep and strong and sweet; it is both pure and passionate, and my marriage to Earlcote has made it plain to me, so palpably plain that you were right when you said to me years ago that in marriage there is purity only in passion. It cannot be otherwise . . ."

She remained silent for a while, then continued:

"Because I am a thoroughly normal woman now, Dicky boy, I long to be your wife. I long for your constant companionship—to live with and for you, to serve you. Ah, Dick, Dick, you may marvel at the change that has taken place in me. I cannot tell you how it came about. It came slowly, almost unnoticably, through the

slow, creeping hours of a year. And one summer's day, Dick, when Earlcote and I were in our home in the Pocono Mountains, in walking through the grounds of a neighboring hotel I saw a curious thing. Near a small, daintily built summer-house in which we were resting, was a mound of decaying matter, and from this grew the three most perfect and beautiful ears of wheat that I have ever seen. They were perfect things of their kind, large, exquisitely formed, as high as a man almost, and without blemish or flaw. As I looked at their golden heads, swaying gracefully to and fro on the strong, tall stalks, they seemed to me to typify Hope, Faith and Charity, the three most sacred and tender and pure emotions of which the human heart is capable. Then it occurred to me that just as those three perfect ears of wheat had grown out of the waste matter, so did the finest and purest and most spiritual emotions grow out of what seems to us the lower human nature, and to be as closely dependent upon that for sustenance as the three ears of wheat were dependent upon the soil from which they grew. Then, in a flash, I realized how foolish I had been, how stupidly arrogant had been the pride in my belief that I, alone among men and women, was free from what it had pleased me to call 'the trammels of the flesh.' I understood, dearest, that there are depths and heights in human nature which words cannot fathom or explain, depths and heights above and below reason, and that it rests with the individual whether the dross of love be used as a soil for what is highest and best in us, or whether, remaining untilled, the weeds in it run to seed and choke up the spirit. Oh, Dicky, Dicky, I had suffered before—but what I suffered after that realization came to me, you will never be able to comprehend. Then, finally a new optimism was in me. It seemed to me that in sacrificing myself so that you might live, I

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had not been wholly unselfish. Deep down in my heart, sub-consciously, unrecognized by myself, hope and faith had been imbedded right along that you and I would some day be truly united.

"But now, Dick, for a little while, I could almost wish back the old days of spiritual pride and contempt for the flesh, because I would then feel myself so much more justified in doing what I am doing. Ah, Dicky, if mothers would only be frank with their daughters, teach them to look at marriage and love in the right way, instead of treating the closest tie in nature as something to be absolutely avoided and shunned in all conversation.

"And, Dicky, in spite of all I have endured, I am almost thankful for my bitter experience. My views were garbled at the outset. My mother—I do not wish to blame her—gave me a distorted view of marriage and love. Even you, dear, were so mortally afraid of wounding me, or offending my purity that I think you would have allowed me to pass through life without awakening me. Earlcote did not hesitate to awaken me. He forced me to speak and think about those matters which I hated most to think and speak about. He was merciless and remorseless—but you, dearest, you and myself, will profit by the pains which he took for the sake of my voice.

"I know I am right in doing as I am doing, reason and the voice of the heart approve of the step. But deep down in my soul, Dick, there is a sediment of shame, and that feeling of shame I cannot wholly combat."

Dicky sat very still for a few minutes, her hands between his. Then he said, softly:

"Dearest, I love you too well, too sacredly, to allow the slightest alloy of untruth to tincture what I say to you. The feeling of shame you speak of arises from the fact that in taking this step we are committing not a breach against morality in the abstract, but an offense

against organized society. Society, to protect itself against irregular unions and children born outside of wedlock, must taboo the participants in an irregular love affair. Society cannot allow the individual to be judge of the merits of his or her own case, and the only reason society does not deal as summarily with such offenders as with thieves and burglars, by placing them under lock and key, is the circumstance, that if all irregularities of conduct were made public and punished, the gigantic task of jailing the offenders and of providing sustenance and clothes for them during the term of their imprisonment, as well as of carrying on the business of the world in the interim, would devolve upon about one-half of society, I imagine, for the other half would be in jail.

"Betty, darling, society has progressed. Our case is unique. Society will be lenient in dealing with us. All the world loves a lover, you know, and the sacrifice you have made for me will go far towards smoothing our way.

"However, dearest, if you cannot suppress the feeling of shame of which you speak, if you feel that that emotion of shame is bound to persist—then, sweetheart, you must not remain here with me. Then, at least for the present, return to your own home, and reconsider and weigh the consequences of coming to me."

He had relinquished her hand, and sat moodily staring at the carpet, running the fingers of his right hand through his hair.

Doubt came to her. Was he trying to extricate himself from a position which, he knew, would be distasteful to himself now that he came to examine it closely? Was this the true reason of the protective attitude he was assuming? She hated herself for doubting him, but the feeling of insecurity persisted, and the older doubt,

the doubt that had harassed her for over five years, gathered about the new doubt and made it grow in stature as a rolling snowball thrives and fattens.

She sat in mute misery. She was crushed by the sense of impotence which comes to every one at some time or other upon realizing the utter hopelessness of trying to penetrate the innermost thoughts of another.

Suddenly he looked up, and his manner and his words gave her the most trustworthy proof of his single-mindedness that she could have asked.

"Betty," he cried, "how can I give you up now? I can't bear to think of losing you, after the hope not merely of knowing you my wife in all but name, but of having you as my constant, inseparable companion. I love you, Betty, I love you deeply, but just because I love you I feel in honor bound to protect you against yourself, against your generosity to me. I must not take advantage of your generosity or of your weakness, or of both conjoined. Therefore—go back and reconsider, but, oh, Betty!" he clasped his hands together, frenziedly, again and again, "if you intend taking my advice, then go soon, and go quickly, otherwise my sweetheart, I will lose control of myself. After all I am only human, Betty. I am a man, and you are the woman whom I love and idolize. And, oh, *how* I want you—want you as wife and companion for ever and ever."

He threw himself into a large arm-chair and pressed the fingers of his right hand over his eyes. With the left hand he gripped the arm of the chair with such intensity that there was no longer any doubt of his suffering.

Betty crossed to him and sat down upon the vacant chair-arm. Leaning over, she gently tried to pull away the hand held before his eyes.

"Dicky," she said, "Dicky, I shall never leave you now.

Listen to me, dearest. A moment ago I thought that you were afraid on your own account to take this step. I thought you wanted to get out of the affair as gracefully as you could."

"Betty!" His hand came away from his eyes and he regarded her indignantly.

"Yes, Dicky." She stooped and kissed first one eye, and then the other. "It was horrid of me, I admit. You see, dear, I am not quite perfect, as you love to think I am. And now that I know that you really want me, I am not going to reconsider. You have got to protect me now, dearest, not against myself or yourself, but against Earlcote. I am afraid of him, Dick. I would not go back to him after the scene of last night for worlds. After all I said to him yesterday—it would be impossible for me to go back. As I told you, Dick, we have not been man and wife for over a year, but Earlcote is cruel —you can hardly understand how terribly cruel he can be; and I am not a woman who can live in a state of perpetual warfare, nor could I submit myself to him after seeing you again, Dicky, after speaking to you as I have spoken, and after kissing you."

Abruptly she threw herself into his arms and offered him her lips.

"Kiss me, Dick," she commanded, "kiss me, dearest, kiss me as you used to in the dear sweet days of the past."

A few minutes later, her face lying against his shoulder, she said:

"There are things, dearest, I could never tell you except like this, my face hidden in your embrace. Oh, Dick, the inferno I lived through! No, no, I cannot tell you all—not even now—wait!"

Too indignant to trust himself to speak, Richard held her in his embrace without kissing her, petting and sooth-

ing her as she wept tempestuously, by stroking her hair, caressing her cheek, whispering tender, foolish words of endearment.

Finally, when she had stopped crying, he said, determindedly:

"Betty, darling, I am going to go and see Earlcote."

"No, no. It would do no good."

"However, I wish to see him. Some one will have to tell him of our decision, and it seems to me I am the one to do it. To save our dignity, dear, we must apprize him in advance of what we are going to do."

"I am afraid he will kill you, or you him."

Dick laughed.

"And, then, Dicky boy, I am afraid to be left alone. I positively am. Earlcote is not above locking you up in the apartment, and sending some of his servants to kidnap me. I am afraid, horribly afraid, to be left alone."

"That being so, I will telephone to police headquarters for a brace of able-bodied detectives."

And telephone he did. He awaited the arrival of the detectives, and turned Betty over to them for safe-keeping, to her intense chagrin. Then he went to Betty's apartments in hopes of there learning Earlcote's whereabouts.

He was told that Mr. Earlcote had just come in and was in the library, awaiting Mrs. Earlcote's return. Richard had himself announced, and a moment later followed the servant through the little rose-and-gold ante-room, in which Betty had greeted him two days ago, into the library, a dainty apartment in white and sea-green.

Huddled in a large fur coat, a fur tippet about his throat and a fur cap upon his head, Earlcote sat in front of the gas-log fire. His face was smaller and more cadav-

erous than when Richard had last seen him, five years ago, and his complexion, in the pale light of the cold winter morning, seemed green rather than gray.

"What gives me the unexpected pleasure?" He motioned Richard to be seated, but Richard said, curtly:

"Thanks, I prefer standing. I will be brief. I came in regard to the matter of which Mrs. Earlcote spoke to you last night."

"What have you to do with that?"

"Everything, it seems to me. Mrs. Earlcote, I think, was explicit. She told you frankly that, unless you consent to divorce, she will abandon her stage career. I do not know whether she told you that her intention is to live with me as my wife."

"As your mistress, you mean! And you have the audacity to come here to tell me that!"

"Manliness, not audacity, prompted me to come here. Mr. Earlcote, your entire line of conduct has been so infamous that words cannot express the indignation I feel. Nevertheless, you are Betty's husband, and, as such, are entitled to be apprized of our decision."

In a low, menacing voice Earlcote replied:

"Have a care. I know my wife better than you do. She will never fly in the face of convention, not though she loved you a thousand times more than she does, and hated me a thousand times worse than she does."

"I may convince you that I am right when I tell you that although I entreated her to return to her home for at least a few more days in order to thoroughly reconsider this step, she refused to do so."

Earlcote's breath came and went like a series of hisses. Richard continued:

"Not only did she refuse to return to you, but she implored me to protect her against you, which I did effectively by surrounding her with a cordon of detec-

tives, who, also, are aware that I have come to this apartment."

"That sounds almost as if you were afraid of me."

"If I were afraid I would not have come. But to save time and possible complications, I thought it well to let you know that several police officials know that I entered this house at a certain hour."

There was a brief pause. Richard, watching Earlcote narrowly, thought he detected a marked change in him. Formerly, in spite of his poor, twisted body, he had given the impression of forcefulness. This morning, he seemed broken and small; even his malignancy seemed less appalling than formerly.

"You did not come here merely to notify me that Mrs. Earlcote intends breaking her marriage vows?"

"I came for that purpose, yes. I came, also, because I entertained a fugitive hope that you might still reconsider her proposal, and consent to a divorce in consideration of which she would pledge herself to retain your name and to continue on the stage."

Richard paused, and as Earlcote said nothing, Richard resumed:

"Surely, to a man of your temperament, it would be intensely cruel to see the labor of years go for nothing. I fail to understand why you hesitate, since you do not love her."

"That's neither here nor there," Earlcote broke in angrily. "As my wife, she is my possession, and, as long as she is my wife, I can hear her sing when and where I choose—at midnight, if I wish, at three o'clock in the morning, if I please. I will not give her up to you." He sat erect his grayish-green face flushed slightly, some of the old malignancy and egotism seemed to flash from his eyes. "I hate you," he said, "I hate you more bitterly than I have ever hated any one, and

I cannot bear to see you in possession of everything that I covet in vain."

Richard looked at Earlcote in amazement. It suggested itself to Richard that Earlcote was referring to his, Richard's career. He remembered Earlcote's former jealousy, the story that Kitty had told Betty. But it seemed to him that Earlcote's jealousy was unfounded. He remembered Earlcote's playing as being superhumanly perfect, while his own, in spite of the fame he had achieved, seemed deficient to him as compared to the highest criterion he knew—Earlcote's musicianship. He stood, somewhat dazed by the compliment which Earlcote was paying him, somewhat frightened lest Earlcote should adhere to his refusal because of his professional jealousy.

Earlcote continued:

"The world is at your feet. The very critics dare not carp for fear that in belittling you they will merely belittle themselves. That—precisely that, was my position in the musical world when the accident occurred which tumbled my future in the dust. But there is one difference. I had reached the pinnacle of my career, I could have gone no further, but you have not yet reached your highest altitude. The world at large does not know that; the critics have not enough ability or discernment to know—but you know it, and I know it, and every pianist who has ever heard you knows it. Three years hence, in addition to brilliance of technique and tone and a profundity of intelligence such as I would not have believed possible in any one but myself, you will add mellowness, depth and sweetness. There was a time—it is not long ago—when I scoffed at intelligence in interpretation, when I believed that feeling only should govern our playing. I have come to think differently in the last year, in which a change has come into my life, of which

I will not speak now. In me, emotions were developed first, intelligence only late in life. In you the intellectual development preceded the emotional. Three years hence you will not be merely the peer of the Earlcote who played in public for the last time seven years ago—you will be his superior. And I—I am forced to sit by and see you encroaching on my fame, see you eating it up, overshadowing it. Oh, my God—what suffering, what intolerable suffering!"

He stopped speaking. His face had lost its twisted, contorted, gargoyle expression, and, as he leaned back, exhausted from his passionate speech, Richard marveled to see that a certain grandeur was apparent in this man. Richard had every reason to hate and despise him, but as he looked at the haggard white face, upon which mental and physical suffering had set the patent of their own ineffacable nobility, he felt neither hatred nor contempt, merely a deep and profound pity.

Leaning back in his chair, eyes closed wearily Earlcote spoke:

"You must understand now that what you ask of me is more than any one who is a mere man could possibly accede to. I must cling to the forlorn hope that if I do not consent to a divorce, her courage to take the decisive step will fail her at the last moment, or that, taking it and overcome with remorse, for her conscience is very tender and her pride in her spotless reputation very great, she will yet return to me. And now—go, go."

So small and colorless was the face which lay against the high back of the chair imbedded in tippet and cap of fur that it looked like the face of a wax doll, or of a corpse.

Richard turned and went from the room, without bidding Earlcote adieu. He had entered the apartment filled with deadly hate. He left it feeling awed—realiz-

ing that if he himself and Betty had suffered, this man, who had caused their suffering, had suffered no less. If it had not been for Betty, he would have forgiven Earlcote, but isolated phrases of Betty's story rang in his ears. He could forgive for pain inflicted upon himself, not for torture to which his Betty had been subjected.

He stepped into the elevator, but before the elevator boy had time to close the gate, an idea flashed into Richard's head, and he jumped from the car, and nervously began pacing up and down the long hall.

It seemed to him that Earlcote hated him and envied him with greater intensity than he loved Betty's voice and gloried in its possession. It was likely, then, that if he, Richard, promised to renounce his career, Earlcote would agree to a divorce. The possibility of carrying through this plan excited him intensely. The sacrifice involved for himself was monumental, and he recoiled with something like terror from the vista of a future barren of public homage and the joy of publicly practicing his art. The struggle, however, was brief. He put the question to himself selfishly. What was dearer to his heart, public success or Betty's happiness? For this was the fine point, as he, with his delicate perception of abstractions, was quick to see. Betty was his, whether he decided upon making the burnt offering of himself for her sake, or not. But Betty's happiness could be insured in no other way, and by no other means, for, coming to him unmarried, Betty would never be wholly happy, or contented, or at peace with herself. She would be merely less unhappy than as Earlcote's wife.

His mind, set on fire by the feasibility of the idea, sprang, flame-like, from crag to crag, from point to point of the discussion into which he was about to enter. It was thus that Richard thought; no slow, pedantic, labori-

ous reasoning out of a problem, but a sort of incandescent absorption, seeing every phase of a question as white-hot light or visible shadow.

Finally he went back to the door of the Earlcote apartment and rang the bell.

"Is Mr. Earlcote still in the library? If so, you needn't announce me." Betty's English man-servant, puzzled and a little shocked by Richard's unceremoniousness, prepared to interpose an objection, but Richard brushed past him and strode into the library. Earlcote was sitting there in the same posture in which he had left him.

"I have come back again, Earlcote, with another proposition."

Earlcote, without stirring, opened his eyes.

"Well?" he asked wearily.

Richard drew off his gloves, flung them upon his hat, and, without an invitation, drew up a chair and sat down, close at Earlcote's side. Then he asked, in a low eager voice:

"Will you agree to divorce Mrs. Earlcote if, in turn, I agree to abandon my career on the day of our marriage?"

Earlcote looked Richard between the eyes fully a minute before answering.

"Are you serious?" he asked.

"I certainly am."

"Do you realize what you are offering to do? Look at me—I gave you a glimpse of my disappointment and bitterness before, but, believe me, it was only a glimpse. Is any woman worth such a sacrifice?"

"I do not think you quite understand the situation," Richard said, gently. "Betty has promised to be mine—you understand—marriage or no marriage. But it is Betty's happiness and peace of mind of which I am thinking. I told you before that I tried this morning to get her to reconsider this step. She refused to do so.

She is anxious to burn her bridges. But I realize more keenly than she does that if she comes to me as my—well, not as my wife—she is going to suffer cruelly. I wish to spare her that suffering. She has suffered so much, so very much in the past, that out of my great love for her I feel I want to do what I can to make her future life cloudlessly happy. That is why I returned to your apartment with this new proposition. It occurred to me in the hall. Well, will you accept it? Yes or no?"

"Tell me," Earlcote spoke, musingly, "tell me, is it really only love that prompts you to make this sacrifice, or is it gratitude? Is it the feeling that you owe it to her to give up your career because she saved your life and made possible your career?"

Something in Earlcote's voice attracted Richard's attention and perplexed him. He said:

"If I were actuated by gratitude, I would be doing Betty a very poor service. She would inevitably discover, sooner or later, that my gain in having her my wife does not outbalance the loss of my career. And the cognizance of that would make her unhappy, just as my cognizance of her suffering if she were not my wife would make me unhappy. We must both be gainers, she and myself, if our happiness is to be firmly established."

"I see," Earlcote said, musingly.

"Besides," Richard's voice vibrated, "besides, I must correct a slight inaccuracy contained in your statement. I do not owe my career to Betty further than that she saved me for the brilliant chance that came to me."

"Pardon me, but you do owe your career to Betty." Earlcote spoke with averted eyes. "When she promised to marry me, she insisted that I arrange to pay part of the sum of money agreed upon between us to some musical organization, arranging with them that the money

be represented to you as a scholarship emanating from that organization. I am surprised she never told you."

Richard rose and stood looking into the fire, leaning his elbows heavily on the mantel. After a little while he said:

"No, she never told me." Again he fell silent, Earlcote watching him furtively from under contracted brows. Richard was mentally searching for something, something that Betty had said, something that concerned the thing Earlcote had just told him. An abnormally quick intuition was among Richard's feminine traits, and it came to him that what Earlcote had just told him had to do with Betty's doubt of him. But what?

Finally he turned to Earlcote and asked:

"Well, have you made up your mind yet, is it yes or no?"

"Betty is to continue on the stage, bearing my name?"

"Only until the divorce is arranged."

Earlcote demurred. They haggled over this, as Betty and Earlcote had once haggled over Richard's future. Suddenly, at the moment when Richard least expected a weakening of purpose, Earlcote gave in.

"And when do you retire from public life?"

"On my wedding day."

Earlcote wished him to retire at once, but Richard pressed the point that he needed money—that it was necessary for him to provide for at least one or two years of the future. Earlcote said, brusquely:

"Oh, very well. Have your way. Do me the favor to sign a paper, containing our agreement. It would not stand in any court of law, but between gentlemen—you will find ink and paper on the table yonder."

Richard seated himself at the table indicated.

"Do you wish me to word the agreement, or will you?" asked Richard.

Earlcote stretched out his hand. "Write this," he said, imperiously, as if speaking to an amanuensis:

*"'In consideration of the fact that Mrs. Earlcote will receive her freedom at the hands of her husband, Stanley Earlcote, I, the undersigned, hereby agree to terminate my career as a pianist on my wedding day. After that event I will not play anywhere at all in public.'"*

Richard wrote as Earlcote directed, and silently signed the paper. Earlcote, on receiving it, folded it without reading it. Richard walked to the door. There, his hand on the knob, he halted and asked:

"On returning to her home Mrs. Earlcote, I suppose, need have no apprehensions?"

"Apprehensions of what?"

"Of an undesirable intimacy."

"Certainly not."

"Thank you."

"Besides, I will show her the courtesy of not coming here at all. You are aware, I dare say, that these are her apartments, not mine."

"I was not sure. Thank you again. And, good-morning."

"Good-morning." Earlcote echoed the farewell in the same bland tone Richard had employed.

Fifteen minutes later Richard walked into the room where Betty was waiting for him, at his own hotel. He dismissed the detectives at the door, and then sat down beside her as for a long talk.

"You seem strangely happy, Dicky. You do not mean to tell me that Earlcote has consented to a divorce."

"Yes, Betty, he has."

"How did you manage it?"

"I trafficked and bargained."

"Dick!"

"I promised, dearest, that after our wedding day my career as a pianist will be at an end."

"Oh, it's infamous of him to exact such a promise."

"He did not exact the promise. I myself made the offer."

"You must rescind the agreement."

"It is signed, Betty. There can be no rescinding of it."

"No, Dick—you shall not do this for me—you and your art are one."

"I will still have my art, Betty, but I will not be able to ply it in public. Listen to me, sweetheart, I had to choose not between you and my public life, but between something far more precious to me even than yourself. I speak of your happiness, dear. I chose what I wanted most."

"Dicky, oh, Dicky!"

"And now, dear—why did you deceive me all these years?"

"I never deceived you, Dick," she faltered.

"Earlcote told me of the spurious scholarship."

"Ah—I didn't want you to know. I did not want you to feel obligated to me—not for your career."

"Oh, Betty, Betty, how you have loved me always."

"Yes, Dick, but once I doubted you. I thought that you would not be willing to make as great a sacrifice for me as I for you—and now, Dicky, you are giving up for my sake what is dearest to you."

So that was the fact he had delved for without bringing it to light.

"I thank heaven, dearest, that, being weighed in the scales, I have not been found wanting. And, Betty, dear, there is a clause to our agreement—after we are married, dear, you are at liberty to leave the stage."

She began to cry softly.

"Oh, Dick, it was worth enduring all I did to look forward to such complete happiness as your wife. Forgive me, dearest, I am selfish, I forgot that you are paying the purchase price."

"As you once paid it for me," he said. "But I will have my recompense, dearest." And to soothe her, for she was still crying, he said, soothingly, as if speaking to a child:

"In the next six months, dear, I will earn enough to buy a tiny, tiny bungalow in the woods, just big enough for you and me and happiness. We will re-enter Arcady, dear, where we once lived—do you remember? A long, long time ago. And we will give elaborate concerts only for ourselves and the birds, the crickets and frogs. And when we get tired of ourselves, and of the birds and the crickets and the frogs, we will ransack the neighborhood for honest rustics, and invite them to come and hear us play and sing. And when we die, we will be buried in one grave, and a tablet above us will bear the inscription: 'He was a famous pianist, she a great singer, but they forsook the world to live only for themselves.'"

She had stopped crying at last, and now sat, his hand clasped in hers, looking blindly through lashes still wet, across the room, at nothing in particular.

Never had she been dearer to him than at this moment, but, even as he held her hand in his, there entered into his soul a fear, a horrid, ungainly fear of what the future would mean after he was deprived of his splendid career. He did not regret what he had done; he knew that he would have done it all over again; but fear entered his soul at that moment, and he realized that thereafter it would walk at his side.

## CHAPTER III

At eight o'clock in the morning of April thirtieth they were married quietly in the Little Church Around the Corner. The opera season had ended the week before. Richard's and Betty's "last appearance in public" had taken place simultaneously on the previous day. Both the Opera House and Carnegie Hall had been packed. The two events, and the romance linking them together, had made a terrific stir in the musical world. Richard had repeated the same program thrice running on three consecutive days—an unprecedented event.

Betty had plainly stated that her reason for leaving the stage was her marriage to Mr. Pryce, but Richard had been less communicative. It was obviously impossible to tell the press the truth, so he maintained a stony and dignified silence. Betty wept bitter tears on reading the press comments on Richard's projected retirement, for Richard went so far as to refuse to even definitely commit himself as to his retirement. He hated anything in the way of unlegitimate press agent work, and neither repudiated nor confirmed the rumors which had spread, no one knew how, concerning himself.

Richard had bought a tiny cottage in the Adirondacks, very near Mount Eerie, where they had spent what it pleased Richard to call their "first honeymoon." They intended leaving for their home immediately after the ceremony.

As they left the church, a messenger boy who was standing in the tiny pavilion between the church and parsonage, came forward and addressed Richard.

"Mr. Richard Pryce?"

"Yes."

The boy handed him a long, official-looking envelope, received Richard's signature and effaced himself. Betty, peeping over Dick's shoulder, observed:

"Why, Dick, it is Earlcote's writing."

They walked to the pavilion, arm-in-arm, and standing in its shelter, Richard tore open the envelope. It contained a smaller envelope and a letter. From the smaller envelope Richard took the paper which Earlcote had dictated to him the day on which Earlcote had agreed to a divorce.

Hastily unfolding the letter, Richard read the communication aloud.

"DEAR MR. PRYCE:

"It is, I believe, wholly without precedent that the first husband should send the second husband a wedding gift. Yet this is what I am doing. I am returning you the agreement you signed, thereby releasing you of the promise contained therein.

"Have the kindness not to thank me, for—frankly—I am not doing this for your sake. I am cutting a sufficiently ridiculous figure as it is. I am, in brief, releasing you of your promise for your wife's sake.

"You will infer from this that I love her, and this is the truth. Certain emotions, entertained by myself, must strike the onlooker as laughable in the last degree, yet I trust that the kindness of your heart, of which you have given proof on several occasions, will help make you refrain from mirth of which I would be the butt.

"Yes, I love Betty Garside. Understand me—I did not love her when I married her. I loved only her voice. I was mad to cultivate that—the rest you know.

"She hated me—this also you know. I ignored her hatred, as she, no doubt, has told you. Then, about two years ago a singular thing happened, with which I fancy her delicacy did not permit her to acquaint you. It is possible, also, that she has forgotten the occurrence.

"One evening, after she had been singing Elisabeth's prayer for me, I said to her, allowing myself a latitude in giving expression to my thoughts in which I rarely indulge:

" 'Betty, I would give, I know not what, if, of your own accord, you were to put your arms about me and kiss me.'

"She replied:

" 'You can hardly expect me to do that. I have never refused to kiss you when you commanded me to kiss you. It is part of our bargain. But your request for a caress must be couched in words of command.'

"I was stung into replying:

" 'All that because I had the misfortune to become crippled.'

" 'All that,' she retorted with spirit, 'because you are not the man I love. You know as well as I do that if a similar accident were to befall him, I would go on loving him all the same.'

" 'Well,' I replied, 'I will not command you to kiss me, but heaven knows, I would sell my immortal soul for a voluntary kiss from you. I speak not of a kiss of passion, but of a kiss of mere affection.'

"She did not reply, but resumed singing. I do not know what she sang. For once I did not listen. Utterly wretched, in a state of dejection and self-contempt which I have never duplicated before or after, I sat in my chair buried in mournful reflection. I had been married to my wife for over three years. I had made a great singer of her. She respected my authority in every way and at all times, but I could not hope for so small a thing as a kiss of affection. And yet I had been foolish enough to believe on several former occasions that she felt a sort of luke-warm affection for me because she showed me such trifling but comfortable attentions as a daughter may show her father, as reminding me of my rubbers if the earth was moist, or getting a forgotten muffler for me if the wind was sharp.

"I do not know how long I sat there, brooding. She stopped singing, and presently she came and sat down beside me—a very unusual thing for her to do. And

suddenly she put one arm about my neck and kissed me thrice, on the cheek, on the brow and on the temple. Then she rose, and turned up the lamp and offered to read Shelley's 'Queen Mab' for me, and when bedtime came, in bidding me good-night, she touched my brow with her fingers.

"It was that evening, I think, that I began to love her, or perhaps it was only the realization that I loved her which was born that evening. At any rate, though I desired her more than ever after the fashion of a man in love—I respected her disinclinations after that evening, and never after that did I seek an entrance to her room. Thus was I, the cynic, the materialist, the utilitarian, brought to my knees when the voice of the heart began to speak. Do you mock me? I mock myself.

"When you came to see me that morning in November, I was filled with deadly hatred for you. While you talked I began to realize how deep and sincere was your love. Then, because I loved her, the thought came that after all it would be sweet to know her happy. But I felt a fierce desire to test you, to prove you unworthy, so that I might have an excuse for not releasing her. Purposely I told you what I did about my envy of you; you are no fool; I realized that the thought of the sacrifice you proposed ultimately would come to you, and I wanted to see if you possessed the nobility of soul to come back to me with that proposition.

"The rest of the story I need not rehearse. You proved yourself worthy of my Betty. I call her that for the last time. Take her then, and make her happy, and be happy yourself, since without your happiness hers would be imperfect.

"I have not much longer to live. Mock me, if you will. I deride myself. But it is better to sweep the heart clean of hate than to nurture it, for hatred, as I have learned, hurts not him who is hated so much as him who hates. Perhaps, after all, my motives in this singular affair are purely selfish. Let us assume they are. It is more in keeping with my character. I was ever a prince of egoists.

"EARLCOTE."

Richard and Betty stood in silence, shoulder to shoulder, after reading the letter. It was a perfect day. The church gardens were lapped in the glory of early spring. Tender little leaves, curly and soft as the down of a chick, ran along every branch and twig and made the very air where twig crowded upon twig, leaf upon leaf, appear verdant. From the earth rose the sweet odors of spring; the winter's mold quickened by rain and sunlight gave out a rich, warm fragrance as sweet to those who love it as the fragrance of any flower.

Betty was the first to speak.

"Dick," she said, "the one thing wanting to make our happiness complete has come. It was kind of Earlcote."

Richard asked, abruptly: "Betty, after reading that letter, do you still hate him? Is there not perhaps a spark of love for him in your heart, after all? Answer me truthfully, dear. The man's nobility, belated as it is, may have touched you."

"Dicky, I have suspected more than once what the letter tells you. I suspected, also, more than once, that he might release you of this promise. Earlcote seemed so changed the last few times I saw him."

"You have not answered my question."

"Dicky boy, Earlcote is trying to make amends for past evil, to atone for past wrongdoing. That is splendid of him. I admire him for it. And, if you approve, when we get back to town I will call on him at least once a week and sing to him. But as to love—oh, Dicky, Dicky boy, I gave you my love, all of it, the first time I saw you and I have never wavered or faltered in my allegiance to you. I endured a martyrdom for your sake! I can forgive and pity him who inflicted it upon me. But I love him for whom I endured it. I paid a price for you, dearest, just as you were willing to pay a price for me. You and I, sweetheart, belong to each other. We

have paid for each other thrice over in heartache and in pain."

She put her hand upon his arm. In her sweet face was painted the adorable April of bitter-sweet feelings. Forgetting that they were within a stone's throw of the street, Richard clasped her in his arms. One or two passersby smiled and walked on. The sparrows that lived in the trees chattered wildly; a few street urchins nudged each other and ran howling gleefully down the street.

But Richard and Betty heard neither street urchins nor sparrows, saw neither passersby nor the kindly rector who stood smiling behind the curtained windows. They had forgotten everything and everybody except themselves and their happiness.

THE END.

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